The Wire 470 April 2023

The Wire

Adventures in Sound and Music

The Wire 470 April 2023

+ The Wire Tapper 61 free CD

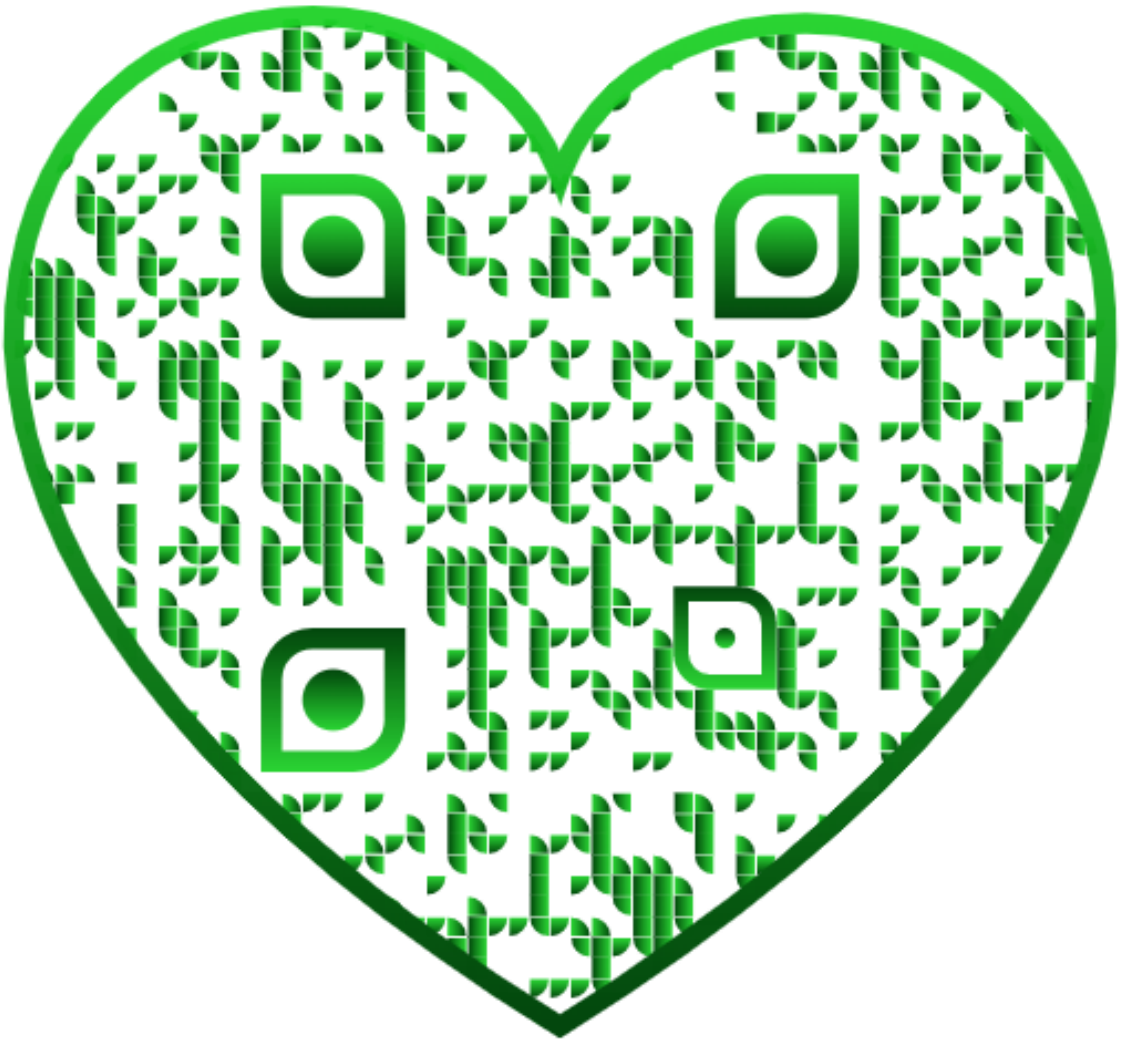
Mihály Víg
Dorothy Moskowitz
patten
Tatsuya Yoshida
Zoë Mc Pherson
Paul St Hilaire
Francisco López

Hands on decks

Maria Chávez / Mariam Rezaei / Victoria Shen

9 770952 068120 04 £5.95

Turntablists / Dorothy Moskowitz / patten / Tatsuya Yoshida



London-based artist Caslean Draws inspiration from Shibuya-kei On her new EP After Candy Melts

London-based art-indie meets bubble-pop creator **Caslean** captures the rush and comedown of modern life on her new EP ***After Candy Melts***. She makes colorful sonic confections, but underneath the rainbow shell hides a core of complicated emotions.

The three-song release matches the dizzying mood with music inspired by the genre-hopping spirit of Shibuya-kei, and tapping into that style's ethos of drawing from the personal, with Caslean mixing indie-rock, synth-pop and more together while singing in her native Chinese. It's a colorful but heartfelt collection, built from her own philosophy of naivety.

After Candy Melts came together after Caslean spent significant time exploring the sounds of '90s Shibuya-ke alongside producer friends **Kian** and **Ninelo**. She was deeply inspired by the stylistic bricolage created by Japanese artists such as **Cornelius, Pizzicato Five** and **GREAT3,** with a splash of **Bjork's** experimentalism. That's captured both directly in Caslean's songs — such as on the cheery synth-and-guitar-bop of **"Sweet Adventure"** and the patchworked bossa-nova-gone-speedy **title track** — and in how she reconstructs her own history, sonically or personally, to create art all her own. Detailing the sugary highs, bittersweet ends and maturing acceptance of modern life, Caslean's latest retrofits Shibuya-kei for now while putting her artistic vision in the spotlight.

***After Candy Melts* is out now.** Caslean will tour England this March with Chinese singer-songwriter **Yuxin Lei**.

About Caslean

Born in Quanzhou, China, Caslean (AKA Kailing Hunag) grew up listening to Chinese pop legends such as **Faye Wong** and **Ivana Wong**, whose approach to singing shaped her own unique delivery. Caslean started creating her own songs shaped by indie-pop in 2015, attracting attention in her home country before relocating to London a few years later, where she has explored how to merge her music with visual art. She has been named one of the top 50 indie artists by Chinese social media sites, and finished in the top five for the UK's Tune Into Nature Music Prize in 2020.

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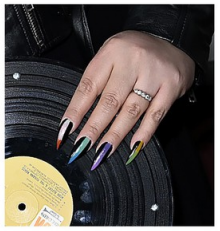

Vinyl manipulators Maria Chávez, Mariam Rezaei and Victoria Shen prepare to hit the road (and the decks).
By Emily Pothast

Cover photography by Amina Gingold, Damien Maloney & Kuba Ryniewicz

Your track by track guide to this issue's free CD

1
dragonchild
"Above All"
From *dragonchild* (FPE)

dragonchild is the new solo project of Danny Mekonnen, the founder of Boston ensemble Debo Band. Growing up in Texas as a first generation Ethiopian-American, Mekonnen often heard traditional Ethiopian instruments and vocals, and later sought out master Ethiopian musicians to learn from. While Debo Band combined those influences with American soul and funk and Eastern European brass, *dragonchild* finds him integrating musical experimentation with spiritual and ancestral practice, blending samples and field recordings with layers of ecstatic saxophone. dragonchild.black, fperecs.com

2
Pleasure
"SELFSUCK 210321"
From *Chop Wood, Carry Water* (Disasters By Choice/GRUPO)

Comprising Adam Connelly (synthesizers), Party Dozen's Jonathan Boulet (bass and effects pedals) and Hugh Deacon (drums), Sydney trio Pleasure create their music through unrehearsed improvisation, balancing distortion and fluidity, the irregular and the hypnotic. "SELFSUCK 210321" is one of seven such jams edited into the 10" release *Chop Wood, Carry Water*, which follows the group's 2021 album *Saint Albans*. disastersbychoice.com

3
Yalla Miku
"Hyper Tigre"
From *Yalla Miku* (Bongo Joe)

Formed in Geneva, Yalla Miku bring together Cyril Bondi and Cyril Yeterian of Cyril Cyril, and Hyperculte's Simone Aubert and Vincent Bertholet with three migrant musicians: Anouar Baouna, Samuel Ades and Ali Bouchaki, from Morocco, Eritrea and Algeria respectively. With rhythmic foundations drawing upon gnawa, krautrock and electronic trance, their songs are embellished by instruments including darbouka drum, guembri lute and the Eritrean lyre krar, with lyrics sung in Arabic, Tigrigna and French. yallamiku.bandcamp.com, bongojoe.ch

4
Ettab
"Khalas Min Hobek (Our Love Is Over)"
From *Ettab* (Elmir)

Singer, actress and activist Ettab (Tarouf Abdulkhair Adam Muhammad al-Talal Hawsawi) was born in Riyadh in 1947 of Hausa descent. As the first female Saudi musician to enjoy an international profile, she continues to be celebrated across the Arab world and beyond. Moving to Cairo in 1980, with later years spent in the UAE, Ettab released 15 albums and appeared in several films before retiring from music in 1997, devoting the last decade of her life to defending the rights of women musicians. elmir-records.bandcamp.com

5
Mungo's Hi Fi featuring Lady Ann
"Good Lovin"
From *Mungo's Hi Fi – Past And Present* (Dumbarton Rock)

For more than 20 years, Glasgow sound system collective Mungo's Hi Fi have shared their love of sound system culture, from its Jamaican roots to raves, clubs and festivals. In addition to DJing and running their heavyweight sound system, the collective of Dougie No Pain, Craigy Wonder, Breezak Bass and Tommy Danger produce music, collaborate with vocalists and release artists on their own Scotch Bonnet label. On "Good Lovin'" they are joined by veteran dancehall vocalist Lady Ann. mungoshifi.net

6
Mehmet Aslan & Valentina Magaletti
"Garden"
From *The Sun Is Parallel* (Planisphere Editorial)

Swiss-Turkish producer Mehmet Aslan's sonic sensibilities bridged Middle Eastern and European cultures during his childhood in Basel, and broadened as the house and techno of his teenage years led to a DJ career known for blending globally expansive sounds. Co-founder of the Fleeting Wax label, his production skills came to the fore on the 2014 *Mechanical Turk* EP. He continues to explore themes of community and migration on his debut album *The Sun Is Parallel*, teaming up with versatile percussionist Valentina Magaletti (Tomaga, Vanishing Twin) for the synthesizer-heavy "Garden". mehmetaslan.eu, planisphere.eu

7
Hollie Kenniff
"Salient"
From *We All Have Places That We Miss* (Western Vinyl)

Drawing together ambient, new age and dream pop into introspective productions, Hollie Kenniff is a Canadian-American vocalist and composer who has released three albums under her own name, and five albums with her husband Keith Kenniff as Mint Julep. Since 2010 the pair have also run the licensing and composing business Unseen, writing film and advertising music for clients including Samsung, Etsy and Netflix. westernvinyl.com

8
Max Nagl Trio
"Radax"
From *Fauteuil* (Jazzwerkstatt)

Vienna based saxophonist and composer Max Nagl has released numerous solo works and collaborations with other artists. He composes music for his various ensembles as well as for theatre and dance productions. Formed with Clemens Wenger and Herbert Pirker, Max Nagl Trio have released three albums to date, including the 2006 Robert Wyatt homage *Market Rasen*. The trio's next album *Fauteuil* follows soon. maxnagl.at, jazzwerkstatt-records.com

Drum Fernandez (1); Mehdi Benkler (3); Christy Mearns (5); Robbie Campbell (6); Johannes Novohradsky (8)

9
Teufelskeller
"Persecution And Clemency" (edit)
From *Teufelskeller* (WV Sorcerer Productions)

Teufelskeller (which, their label's Bandcamp site says, means Devil's Dungeon) came to life in late 2020 when Anton Ponomarev (saxophone/electronics), Konstantin Korolev (bass/electronics) and drummer Andrey Kim joined forces in Moscow's free jazz and improv underground. With Ponomarev also a member of several punk-avant-jazz-noise outfits, Korolev an extreme metal and free improv enthusiast, and Kim (since replaced by Maxime Hänsenberger) a percussionist and electronics artist, the trio's self-titled debut attacks improvisation from all angles. wvsorcerer.bandcamp.com

10
Mads Emil Nielsen featuring Victor Dybbroe
"Installation – 2" (edit)
From *Black Box 3* (arbitrary)

Copenhagen musician and composer Mads Emil Nielsen works with basic sound sources, often combined with short percussive and orchestral samples, and the amplification of machine produced errors. In 2014 he founded the label and artistic platform arbitrary, on which he has released the *Framework* series of graphic scores and recordings, as well as solo works and collaborations including the *Percussion Loops* EP, the album *Refound* with Andrea Neumann, and his *Black Box* series of works originally made for theatre, dance performances and radio soundtracks. madsemilnielsen.dk, arbitraryproject.com

11
Left Hand Cuts Off The Right
"Right Kind Of Personality"
From *Free Time/Dead Time* (Brachliegen Tapes)

Left Hand Cuts Off The Right is the project of London based musician and sound artist Robbie Judkins, who plays, composes and improvises with bent electronics, acoustic instruments, field recordings, loops and effects. *Free Time/Dead Time* combines elements of focused minimalism, experimental electronics and musique concrète to create a series of meditative compositions that reflect the precarious boundaries between labour, leisure and the quality of lived experience under late capitalism. brachliegentapes.bandcamp.com, cargocollective.com/robbiejudkins

12
Sourdurent
"Fuelha de Peira, Peira de Bòst"
From *L'herbe de détourne* (Bongo Joe)

Following in the footsteps of 2018's *L'Espròva* and the previous year's instrumental *Mantras*, both mostly solo efforts released under the Sourdure moniker, Ernest Bergez joins Jacques Puech, Elisa Trebouville and Loup Uberto to explore the possibilities of a collective energy. The traditional repertoire from France's Massif Central mutates and hybridises with invented forms inspired by traditional Greek, Persian and North African music, while the region's Occitan language provides both musical material and a poetic and emotional springboard. sourdure.bandcamp.com, bongojoe.ch

13
Inferion
"Weakness (Dim Past Remix)"
From *Maternity Ward To Crematorium* (Schematic)

Formed in Miami in 1995, Inferion have been purveyors of extreme, death, black and many different genres of metal. They have toured Europe as well as North and South America and have released eight studio albums ranging across the metal spectrum. *Maternity Ward To Crematorium* sees acts ranging from industrial techno producer Blush Response to electroacoustic artist Drowning The Virgin Silence pay tribute by remixing their catalogue. The group's new album *Inequity* is forthcoming on the HPGD label. inferion.net, schematicmusiccompany.bandcamp.com

14
Twin Color
"Going Home" (edit)
From *Twin Color* (InFiné)

Twin Color is the new alias of Fernando Corona, the Mexican producer who as Murcof released ambient albums such as *Martes*, *Utopia*, *Remembranza* and *Cosmos* on The Leaf Label. Working with graphics designer Geilfus to create a video game counterpart to his sonic world-building, Twin Color offers a futurist nostalgia where sweeping *Blade Runner*-esque analogue synthesis combines with the voice of Corona's four year old daughter Alina. instagram.com/twincolormusic, infine-music.com/twin-color

15
Baskot Lel Baltageyya
"Baskot (Biscuits)"
From *Baskot Lel Baltageyya* (Akuphone)

Featuring Cairo musician and producer Adham Zidan (The Invisible Hands), audiovisual project Baskot Lel Baltageyya playfully bridges the gap between experimental and pop music. Inspiration comes from shaabi music, old Egyptian TV scores, early electronic music and Western psychedelia, while their lyrics tap into the dark absurdist humour prominent in 1990s Egyptian popular culture. akuphone.com

16
Pas Musique
"Inevitable"
From *Shaman* (Alrealon Musique)

Pas Musique emerged from Brooklyn, New York in 1995 as musician/painter Robert L Pepper's solo project. Through its many experimental and electronic iterations, he has collaborated with Faust, Martin Bisi, z'ev, Philippe Petit, HATI, Chester Hawkins and Jim Tuite; and Rapoon aka Robin Storey on the two *Confluences* releases of 2021 and 2022. pasmusique.net,

The Wire Tapper 61 is given away with all copies of *The Wire* 470, April 2023. If your copy of the CD is missing or damaged, either return the magazine to where you bought it to get a replacement, or contact *The Wire*: +44 (0)20 7422 5010, subs@thewire.co.uk.

NB all subscribers to the magazine, both print and digital, can get a download of the compilation at thewire.co.uk/audio/the-wire-tapper.

Pavlo Shevchuk (10); John Convery (11); Helene M Tarabay (15)

The Masthead

When De La Soul's Trugoy aka David Jude Jolicoeur died in February, I kept listening back to "A Roller Skating Jam Named "Saturdays"", with its 30 second mid-track breakdown that contains one of his greatest ever verses. But the real hook of that track is not the rapping but the fat chunk of DJ scratching that introduces it. A record cuts hard against the needle, its sound warped by the hand on the vinyl, and this small but razor-sharp shard runs all the way through the track. A whole world of sound has been flipped and juggled with just the flick of a wrist and some cut 'n' splice.

Turntables allow musicians to work and rework sound in a hall of mirrors, to play audio recordings like they were a whole new instrument, which is at least part of the reason for their longevity in experimental music. Turntablism has become an even more powerful artform since the 1980s and 90s era of Christian Marclay and The Invisibl Skratch Piklz, because the advent of Digital Vinyl Systems and software like Traktor and Serato has allowed DJs to channel any sound or music from history through their scratch set-up.

Mariam Rezaei's 2020 album *Skeen* was a recent gauge of these possibilities. Taking sounds from collaborators including saxophonist Tony Bevan and experimental vocalists Fritz Welch and Sharon Gal, Rezaei dissects and twists their contributions into writhing new sonic lifeforms. A decade or so earlier, Japan's dj sniff had given Evan Parker's saxophone solos a similar alien rebirth.

Fast forward to the present moment, and the range of distinctive practices of contemporary turntablists is near infinite.

Sankofa, an immersive and highly original beatless sound space themed around Afrofuturism and comic book adventures created by the Leeds based NikNak, uses record decks to marinate the sound, like cooking on three or four hobs until complex flavours slowly develop.

Over in Israel, the contrast is stark. Strotter Inst uses manipulated headshells on Lenco turntables to create grinding industrial textures on *Hornochse/Gnadenhof*, a maze of slowly rotating test tones and skips and hums that evokes a feeling of being trapped in the machinery. Throw in the madcap experimenter cum inventor Graham Dunning, and the turntable scene is a source of constant surprise.

This month, Rezaei links up with fellow turntable experimenters Maria Chávez and Victoria Shen for a new touring project, one which provides the hook for this issue's cover story.

In their collaboration, as Rezaei cheerfully admits, "we have no idea what's going to happen". But the three of them underline the power that can be found in a spirit of community between DJs and turntablists that the new project hopes to capture. "Does the turntable really push us into a new place?" poses Rezaei. "Actually it can, but not every turntablist does."

Derek Walmsley

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Breakout

Limited Clear vinyl reissue! Vintage Collection! The Queens of Lover's rock Louisa Mark, also known as "Markswoman" (and) the Creator of Lover's Rock Clem Bushay as producer Featuring Aswad, Zabandis, The Heptones, Rico and Don Drummond Jr., Dennis Bovell, The In Crowd, Dave Barker, Owen Gray... and more

LANTERN REC

Alpha&Omega
Ancient A&O

"Ancient A&O is a selection of unreleased tracks and dubs we like from our old DAT tapes all created during our early years between 1989 and 1993. It includes Here For A Reason, a rare unreleased track featuring Nishka. We're very pleased the great Lantern Rec. are releasing the vinyl and we hope you like it, many thanks... A&O"

LANTERN REC

Maximum Joy
White & Green Place (extra-terrestrial mix)
plus essential dance tracks

Reissued on vinyl for the first time Maximum Joy's "White & Green Place extra-terrestrial mix" 12" single - with 3 bonus tracks – originally released in 1982 on Y Records. "We're excited for this new vinyl reissue of White & Green Place extra-terrestrial 12" single with additional tracks specially compiled for your dancing feet! Maximum Joy tunes to make you move!

Janine

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Pleasure principle
In response to your invitation to comment on the new design of the magazine [Masthead, *The Wire* 469], I'd like to convey my unreserved admiration for the look and feel of the publication.

Having been a reader intermittently for nearly 30 years, and a subscriber for the past five years or so, I've lived through a few iterations of the magazine. The March issue is a pleasure to behold and read. It somehow has a suppleness that enhances the tactile experience of reading print media, while the new font is highly attractive to these increasingly myopic eyes.

There's no compromise on the written content, or the sublime photography that graces its pages. And everything is exactly where it was before, which in my view is precisely as it should be.

I've yet to finish reading the issue, but should make mention of some its standout contributions: Miloš Hroch's Širom feature, Mark Wastell's tribute to The Specials, Bill Meyer's review of Roscoe Mitchell's exhibition at Chicago's Corbett Vs Dempsey gallery, Ioannis Kotsonis's Global Ear article from Athens, and Neil Kulkarni's glowing review of Yo La Tengo's latest release.
Robin Nicholl, Plymouth, UK

Type writer
Just to convey a massive thank you for the new look, most especially, for the font design. I'll be honest, one criticism of the last version, if asked, would have been the 'spindly' font, which didn't always make for a 'comfortable' read. I don't have a background in graphic design but I know good typography is crucial to effective printed and electronic communication. A faster, more engaged read? Yes.
James Chater, via email

Bed head
I have put the new *Wire* format to the ultimate test: reading it while lying on my bed. I am rather pleased with the result as I am able now to read pages, top to bottom, without inflicting unnecessary strain to my Neck (there you go), nor pulling my eyes out of their sockets. Please receive these most sincere congratulations from a long time subscriber, and from his opthalmologist too. My only doubt is whether the change actually adheres to new, more contemporary design, or to the lobbying of neck-straining bed readers with progressive glasses at *The Wire* office. Keep it up!
David Rengel, Toulouse, France

Design faults
I hope everything's going well with the new format. As the publisher's editorial invited readers to give their views on the redesign, I thought I'd drop you a line, but I'm afraid my notes are a bit negative, and TBH I hesitated a lot about sending them.

Unfortunately, overall I find the redesign too cold and sterile. Pages feel cramped due to the proportional increase in type area. I realise the magazine isn't trying to shout and aims to be 'stark' as the publisher put it, but with the reduced space for photographs, it desperately needs some colour to give it just a little bit of life, particularly in the Soundcheck and Columns sections which now feature smaller and fewer photos making them feel more like an appendix. The different Columns don't stand out and could do with a bit more white space between them to signal them better.

I'm personally not a fan of justified type and find monolithic slabs of text uninviting. The previous ranged left type was easier on the eyes and gave the pages more room to breathe, plus as the whole magazine had ranged left type it gave it a uniformity. Now with some columns justified and some ranged left, it feels a bit unharmonious, like two magazines have been spliced together.

The type is now in a larger point size despite the lines of text having what looks like the same leading as before and this also contributes to the pages looking cramped. Going for a larger point size might logically sound like it would be easier for people to read but type needs space to breathe otherwise it's not so easy on the eyes. I understand if it was felt the text was too small before, and probably somewhere between the previous typesetting and the new typesetting would have been the sweet spot. As for the headlines, I find the treatment uninspiring compared to before, but I understand that this might evolve over time.

Sorry to be a pooper. I wouldn't have bothered emailing if I didn't love the magazine and want it to look the best it could. Hopefully I'm in the minority and most people like it.
Manuel Optigram, via email

Phrase out
In his survey of Crammed Discs [Issue 469] Clive Bell describes the work of Konono No 1 as a variation on "Bazombo Trance Music". You will not find that phrase anywhere except to characterise Konono No 1 since, though its origins are obscure, it's likely the invention of some publicist or journalist who sought to read mystical or ritual features into the music. Ethnomusicologist David Font-Navarrete has thoroughly debunked this exoticising gesture in his article "File Under Import: Musical Distortion, Exoticism And Authenticité In Congotronics", *Ethnomusicology Review 16*, 2011.

You'll be pleased to know Font-Navarrete speaks highly of *The Wire*'s earlier coverage of the group.
Paul Rekret, via email

Local news
I appreciate and respect the opinion of readers who deem *The Wire* lacking in diversity and too deeply entrenched in your capital [Letters, issue 468]. Although I feel that this feedback may be legitimate, I would much prefer to read reviews and articles by contributors writing from their own perspectives and experiencing their music locally – even if that may be in the city of London. I didn't subscribe to a magazine from somewhere else. Keep up the great work!
Rob Cosier, via email

Corrections
Issue 469 In Print Run, Herman Chin-Loy produced *Aquarius Dub*, not Joseph Hoo-Kim, as stated in Steve Barker's review of *A History Of The Jamaican Recording Industry*. The correct title of the Simon Strange book is *Blank Canvas*, and the institution in question was Black Mountain College.

Issue 468 In Soundcheck, the surviving founder members of Negativland should have included David Wills.

Coming next month, free subscriber download: *Below The Radar 42*

To coincide with the publication of next month's May issue of *The Wire*, all the magazine's subscribers, both print and digital, will be able to download the latest album in its ongoing series of underground music compilations, *Below The Radar*.

Browse the full track listings of all the albums in the *Below The Radar* series here: thewire.co.uk/audio/btr. For details of how to subscribe to *The Wire*, see page 104 or go to: thewire.co.uk/susbcribe. The May issue of the magazine will be on sale from 14 April.

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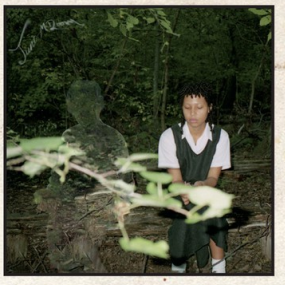

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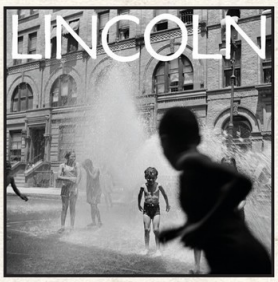

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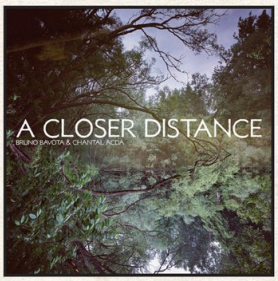

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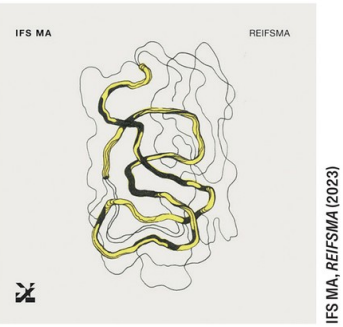
Unlimited Editions: Outlines

The Polish experimental dance imprint stretches Chicago footwork into abstract and minimal mutations

By Miloš Hroch

SNKLS, *Glu River* (2022)



IFS MA, *REIFSMA* (2023)

When footwork – the ultra-syncopated, 160 bpm dance style born of ghetto house – started to spread from Chicago neighbourhoods across the globe, Poland was its gateway to Europe. DJ Rashad, DJ Spinn and other Teklife label associates made their first appearances on the continent in Warsaw and Krakow in the early 2010s. One reason for the connection may be that Chicago is home to one of the largest Polish diasporas outside Poland, and the city is sometimes nicknamed American Warsaw. But it was mainly down to the people, including footwork evangelists like Paweł 'Paide' Dunajko.

With his tape label Outlines, the Wrocław based DJ, curator and promoter explores how footwork mutates between different geographies and artistic approaches, while taking numerous detours. The label is categorised in two strands: more beat-driven groove releases, and the guides series, taking footwork into ambient and abstract areas.

On *Groove 4*, Argentinian producer Aylu makes frenetic footwork musique concrète from the sounds of ping pong, while French producer SNKLS's *Glu River* presents brutalist metallic productions as if giant mecha robots were juking around. "Footwork has a natural tendency to mutate, and it is a defining characteristic of Outlines," says Dunajko.

"I went crazy with this complex, rough music," he says of his early experiences with footwork, as he recalls his initial contact being through DJ Nate's *Hatas Our Motivation* (2010). "For us Europeans, the footwork discovery came as a surprise, but this culture had been developing since the late 1980s. Despite its local character, RP Boo, DJ Rashad and Traxman were happy that footwork was becoming a global sound," he adds, referencing his conversations with the Teklife crew.

Dunajko has played footwork on his Radio Alternator show *Base Me In* since 2010; he also initiated correspondence with Chicago producers and started to throw gigs for them. Around that time, a gathering of enthusiasts would meet via the Facebook group Polish Juke Community, which subsequently developed into the label Polish Juke in 2013. Dunajko helped Polish Juke to promote local footwork producers like Rhythm Baboon and Lux Familiar, while also organising dance battles.

At the beginning of 2016, Dunajko left in order to start his own operation. He was fascinated by Japanese footwork minimalists like Osaka's DJ Fulltono or Hiroshima's Skip Club Orchestra and CRZKNY, who all released cassettes on Outlines from 2016–17. "The reduction is everything," declares Dunajko. "These producers are taking simple elements of footwork and leaving out all the vulgar samples.

"I like to commission people outside the footwork culture," he continues. "It can create some fresh and unexpected twist." One example is classically trained percussionist Hubert Zemler (part of the duo OPLA). Active in academic and free jazz music scenes, Zemler has previously collaborated with the likes of AMM's John Tilbury. Zemler's 2018 tape *Groove 8* is based on multilayered and playful rhythms with muscular sub frequencies, guided by a sample of Polish sci-fi writer Stanisław Lem talking about cooking human liver – taken from his horror and humorous exercises for his nephew to improve his writing and spelling.

I ask Chicago house and footwork veteran Jana Rush, who released the tape *Groove 6* in 2021, what happens to the style when produced somewhere else. "It's good to hear different drum kits and arrangements. For the most part, it can be exciting and inspirational," she responds. "The gain with respect to geography is the copious amount of styles, sounds and opportunities for collaboration."

With a new release from IFS MA and one from Skip Club Orchestra in the pipeline, Dunajko is sticking to his vision of footwork minimalism. He concludes, "I am testing how far I can transform this form without losing its roots from the horizon of my explorations." ○

outlineslabel.bandcamp.com

Unofficial Channels: Polar Sounds

The Polar Sounds webpage is an online exhibition and archive of Arctic and Antarctic sounds featuring hydrophone recordings of whales and seals, colliding icebergs, sea ice and seismic surveys. Comprising 54 recordings, it was developed in partnership between the Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research and the Alfred Wegener Institute, who research marine biodiversity and ecosystems in cold and temperate regions to advocate for their management and conservation. To promote the archive, the institutions are working with the collaborative global sound resource Cities And Memory to give composers the opportunity to formulate conceptual responses that bring attention to places seldom seen or heard.

The archive itself is interesting for its breadth of subject matter and its emphasis on the bioacoustics produced by marine mammals. Notable examples include an Antarctic blue whale sounding a mournful low frequency oscillation, and the otherworldly weddell seal transmitting a complex amalgam of glissandi, trills and pulsations. The collection also features the anthropogenic sounds of marine traffic, and seismic airguns used for oil and gas exploration, offering powerful evidence of how disruptive these activities are to marine environments. The quality of the archive is variable due to the intensity of some of its subject matter, and the erratic nature of the polar regions themselves, which generate substantial levels of noise through climate and weather, ocean turbulence, ice thickness and fragmentation and air bubbles caused by dissolving ice.

The reimagined compositions included in the project reflect a wide range of musical styles underpinned by an overwhelming sense of melancholy induced by the degradation of these fragile marine ecologies. The aim of Cities And Memory is to present new ways of listening to places such as these through artists who bring divergent philosophical, cultural and political convictions to the source material. These responses are fascinating for the way the marine archive is used to underpin specific sono-musical foci including the construction of narrative and dramaturgy, the production of complex harmonic morphologies, and by disparate forms of hybridity, synthesis and instrumental articulation.

Polar Sounds offers a platform and a means of engagement to help deepen the understanding and appreciation of sounds threatened by environmental dissonance caused by invasive human action. ○

citiesandmemory.com/polar-sounds, citiesandmemory.bandcamp.com/album/polar-sounds

Philip Samartzis

Dredd Foole & the Din on CvsD

Years in the making, this four part series reconstructs the legacy known and the legacy damned of the most overlooked and under-documented American free rock unit. Ultimately comprised of six discs sourced from hundreds of original tapes spanning 1982–1992, more than half of which are previously unreleased, all framed by rare photos, our first archival rock series is a labor of fire.

Songs In Heat 1982
Out Now

Dredd Foole and Mission of Burma discover each other in a howling first-take studio session, presented in its entirety for the first time. The studio effort is coupled with a lo-fi selection of the project's astounding live debut from later that year.

"This recording is astounding! Dan Ireton is not afraid to be ugly or beautiful. A voice like no other." — Kim Gordon

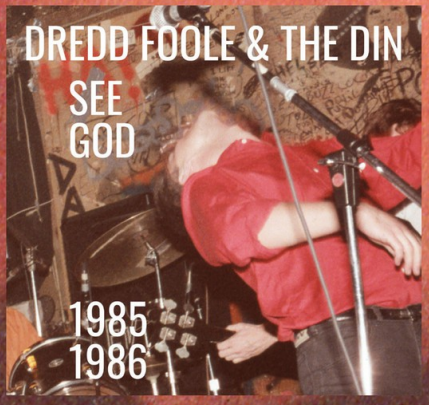
"It's thrillingly unhinged stuff, free rock madness, with Foole leading Mission of Burma into the abyss, going for broke, taking no prisoners. The dangerous sparks of electricity are palpable 40 years later." — Tyler Wilcox, Aquarium Drunkard

We Will Fall 1983
Out This Spring

The miracle continues as Mission of Burma's sole collaboration during their initial incarnation enters its second year. A complete concert performance — live mixed at the soundboard direct to reel — captures the lineup at peak glory, with extras.

See God 1985–1986
Out This Spring

The soul burning Volcano Suns-era Din is presented in its entirety over 2CDs, including both LPs remixed, remastered, and reissued for the first time ever, bountiful live material, unreleased studio material, and more.



CORBETT vs. DEMPSEY

Zoë Mc Pherson

The Berlin based producer's speculative futures showcase a raved-up mix of jungle beats and sound system clashes

By Oli Warwick
Photography by Kasia Kim-Zacharko

"I made "Unidentified Objects" as I was finishing the album," says Zoë Mc Pherson from within the idyllic greenhouse they've chosen as a virtual backdrop for our video interview. It's an apt analogy for the tension they probe in their music between nature and technology with a whiff of idealism. "I wanted to add to the narrative of "Lamella" – this story in the future of what's left of human remains – and also imagine a little bit more positivity, hoping that the living creatures would have a bit more vulnerability or a little bit more kindness, maybe?"

"Lamella" is the centrepiece of the Berlin based French-Irish producer and multimedia artist's new album *Pitch Blender*. Here, Mc Pherson sings from the perspective of a sculpture made of minerals and trash from a lost human civilization languishing at the bottom of a riverbed. *"Spread, disperse now, we're dust, adjust now"*, they sing, making peace with humanity's prospects in the inevitable breaking down of all cellular matter. It follows "Unidentified Objects", an ambient piece about an unknown species discovering the leftover synthetic materials of said civilization, trying to divine their purpose. *Pitch Blender* is an opaque response to the existential pressure of climate change, but shot through with a certain tenderness which the apocalyptic subject matter doesn't often encourage. Like Ursula K Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* or Marge Piercy's *Woman On The Edge Of Time*, Mc Pherson's own brand of science fiction comes with a dash of hope amid the ominous outlook.

"I have a whole map of the album with links and the story for every track," Mc Pherson explains. "I quite like this exercise of inventing another story... of course it's based on reality but maybe it can also be more like your own science fiction. I think it's great when you're entering someone else's world."

Opening track "On Fire" is more on the nose, with an accompanying video directed by longtime collaborator Alessandra Leone which opens on striking, geometric vistas of coalfields, but Mc Pherson argues the troubling clank of metal percussion and lurid rave stabs in the music aren't a one-dimensionally bleak look at a world burning up. ""On Fire" is obviously not only a positive term," they admit. "You know... the planet being destroyed... but also [I'm examining] the beauty of it – the fact that, 'oh wow, it looks really fucking amazing when we're destroying the planet'. In a broader sense it's about the vital need for change."

The track also instantly reveals another seam which runs throughout *Pitch Blender* – Mc Pherson's love of jungle. Sometimes it manifests in certain approaches to rave-tooled sound design, elsewhere in fine slivers of breaks repurposed in unconventional ways. "I would have loved to be able to go and rave at all the jungle and drum 'n' bass parties in the UK," they say, "so I was like, 'Well, I'm doing that now.' In France, where I grew up, you didn't have this sort of music."

Pitch Blender marks a shift from the clattering experimentalism of Mc Pherson's previous releases, 2018's *String Figures* and 2020's *States Of Fugue*. From the tidal synth washes of "On Fire" to the alien synth-pop "Lamella" and the hooky riff teased in "Potentials", the progression of Mc Pherson's sound on *Pitch Blender* reveals itself in melodic content. "When I played in Kazakhstan the first time, one of my friends said, 'Why don't you use melody?' And I was like, I don't like melody! It's boring. It's always cheesy," they explain. "But I've dug a lot into the whole rhythm thing and now I'm exploring melody a bit more."

That statement shouldn't be misconstrued as a death knell for Mc Pherson's exploratory approach to rhythm. Their recent collaborative residency at Uganda's fabled Nyege Nyege festival with Tanzanian singeli pioneer Jay Mitta and Mali's electro-balani scene leader DJ Diaki has resulted in a project called 3OK. Working for five days straight and developing a hand-played, drum-heavy collision of their respective styles, they've since taken the project to Berlin's Berghain for the 2023 edition of CTM. Despite their varying backgrounds, 3OK represents three artists who share an affinity for fast-rushing, intensely percussive sound system music. It's a baseline of intent which applies across Mc Pherson's work.

"I want things to work out well on the sound system and I've improved my mixing skills," they say about *Pitch Blender*. "I grew from all my records. On this one I'm actually wanting it to work in this more... not glossy, but more round... not round either. Clean in a way, but also rough..."

They search for a definitive descriptor and eventually give up. Therein lies the fascination in Mc Pherson's music – a perpetual duality where hyper-detailed futurism collides with an ancient instinct for music that moves the body; where the sheen of laser-focused production doesn't detract from a natural, earthen grit and the emotional trigger of a big melody can also confound and leave mystique in its wake. ○

Zoë Mc Pherson's *Pitch Blender* is released by SFX

Ben
Whishaw

NARRATES

GEORGE

WRITTEN BY

Efthimis
Filippou

MUSIC BY

Panagiotis
Melidis

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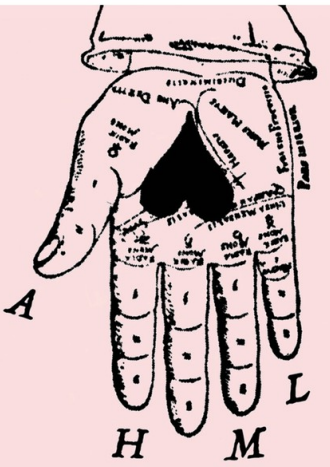

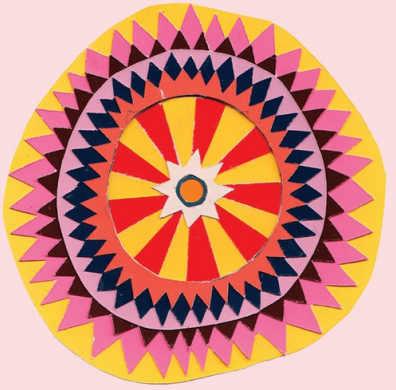

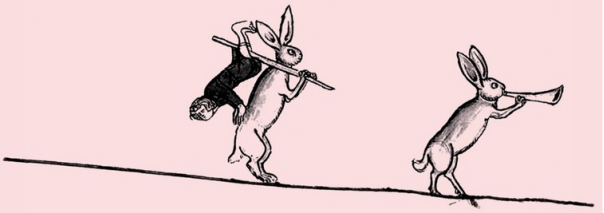

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Francisco Mela

After the death of trio leader McCoy Tyner, drummer Francisco Mela set off on a liberating path through the wilds of free jazz

By Daniel Spicer
Photography by John McKean

Cuban drummer Francisco Mela should be an inspiration to anyone who feels it's too late to make a change. Aged 55, he's already enjoyed a successful career as a straight-ahead jazz drummer, most notably including nearly a decade in McCoy Tyner's mellifluously swinging final trio, up until the pianist's death in 2020. But, in just the last couple of years, Mela has turned away from charts and changes and set out on a bold new post-pandemic path into the uncharted territories of free jazz. At the same time, he's also struck up a fortuitous relationship with the adventurous Brooklyn based 577 label, which has proven the ideal platform for documenting his new endeavours. "577 really support me," he enthuses. "They say, 'Mela, any time, any project, let us know if you're going into the studio to record. Let's do it brother!'"

Thus far, his most prominent project for 577 has been the three album series entitled *Music Frees Our Souls*, which, in effect, announced his defection to the leftfield, and which features Mela playing with bassist William Parker and a different pianist on each album. Volumes one and two – released in September 2021 and this January, respectively – saw him collaborating with Matthew Shipp and Cooper-Moore, two of the most influential stylists of contemporary US free jazz piano. The third volume, due out either at the end of this year or the beginning of next, teams him with a former bandmate, Argentinian Leo Genovese, on piano and saxophone.

All three albums in the series are dedicated to Tyner and, as Mela relates it, the origins of the project can be traced back to two inspiring utterances delivered by his former boss. The first took place near the beginning of his tenure with Tyner during a concert in Tokyo. When Mela felt intimidated by the presence of jazz drummer Lewis Nash in the audience, Tyner gave him a stirring pep talk: "He said 'What are you talking about? I don't care about Lewis Nash. I don't want him to play with me because I have nothing to teach him. I want you to grow with me and pass on to the next generation what you are learning with me. Free yourself! We play music to free our souls, man, come on!'"

The second pivotal moment followed right at the end of his time with Tyner, during the trio's extended residency at New York's Blue Note club. During a break, as Mela remembers, there was a knock at the dressing room door: "There's this little short guy with sunglasses, a Black guy with dreadlocks, and when McCoy saw him he grabbed him and gave him a huge hug. They talked and were so excited, but I didn't recognise the guy. When the guy leaves McCoy said to me, 'I wish I was that free.' It was Cecil Taylor."

It would have been quite an admission from Tyner, who famously left John Coltrane's classic quartet not long after Coltrane fully embraced free jazz. "McCoy never made the avant garde, like totally free," Mela reflects. "I'm dedicating these albums with avant garde musicians to what McCoy wished to be but never was."

It's not the only lasting effect Tyner has had on Mela's career. He's now fulfilling the promise to pass on his learnings by teaching at Berklee College of Music in Boston. "All my students are playing avant garde," he laughs. "They never ask me to play jazz or Cuban music. It's always 'Let's improvise!'"

He's also recorded a handful of free jazz albums with much younger collaborators, all released by 577 last year. *Motions Vol 1* is a duo with former Berklee student and "crazy, genius, young piano player" Shinya Lin. He's cut a duo date *Causa Y Efecto Vol 1* with 22 year old tenor saxophonist and flautist Zoh Amba, and a very deep trio session with William Parker with the Aylerish title *O Life, O Light Vol 1*. The tantalising volume numbers suggest more such excursions are likely to follow.

Mela has taken a circuitous route to get to this position of generous mentorship. He started out in Cuba aged 17, quickly earning a place in the band of Latin jazz pioneer Emiliano Salvador. After Salvador's death, he moved to Cancun, Mexico, and stayed for six years while working with Cuban Latin jazz pianist Gabriel Hernandez. But it was while living in New York for 16 years that he reached prominence as an in-demand jazz drummer, performing with the likes of saxophonists Gary Bartz and Joe Lovano, joining the latter's quartet in 2005 and, in 2016, working in a quintet led by Lovano and Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés.

All of which makes his late conversion to free jazz all the more startling. Moreover, he has something of the recent convert's zeal about him. When we speak, it's the day after he has just played a gig with South African pianist Nduduzo Makhathini, in whose quartet he is the regular drummer. "He writes songs," Mela says, "but I kind of push him in the direction of avant garde too. That's what I do now every time I play with somebody – OK, let's play!" ○

Francisco Mela's *Music Frees Our Souls Vol 2* featuring Cooper-Moore and William Parker is released by 577

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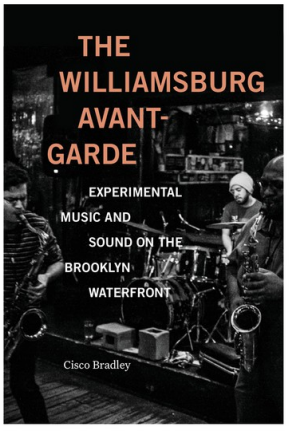

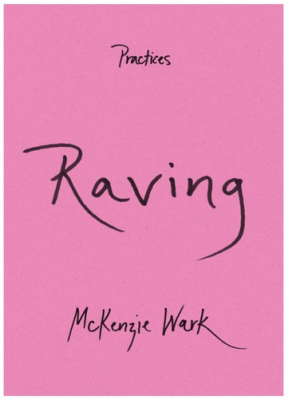

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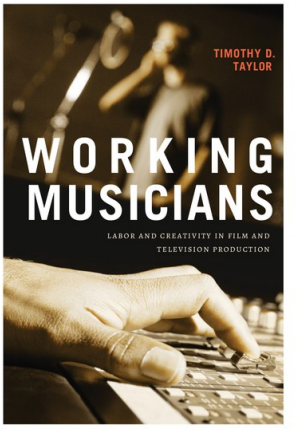

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dukeupress.edu

Brìghde Chaimbeul

The Scottish piper blends traditional melodies with transcendent drones, joining forces with saxophonist Colin Stetson on her new album

By Stewart Smith
Photography by Caitlin Chescoe

Brìghde Chaimbeul is at the forefront of a new generation of Scottish pipers innovating within and outside the tradition. Hailing from the Isle of Skye, Chaimbeul grew up playing the great Highland pipes, but her heart belongs to the bellow-blown smallpipes. A modern adaptation of earlier instruments, the smallpipes have become a popular session instrument, enabling pipers to play with fiddlers, guitarists and singers.

While Chaimbeul primarily plays the smallpipes as a solo instrument, her approach is steeped in song. "The way I first approached the smallpipes, it's led by the melody, the feel and groove of the tune, rather than getting into all the technique," she says, adding that she was also drawn to its reedy timbre and unique combination of drones.

"The extra drone creates a completely different sound," she adds. "You're getting slightly more harmony and dissonance throughout the tune, because you've got either the fourth or the fifth playing constantly."

Recorded live in a Black Isle church, Chaimbeul's 2019 debut *The Reeling* weaves melodies derived from traditional sources through otherworldly drones. Vocal contributions from Lankum's Radie Peat and legendary piper Rona Lightfoot underline the music's roots in traditional song, while the drones and beatings connect it to the sound worlds of Tony Conrad and Alvin Lucier. Since its release, Chaimbeul has explored international pipe traditions, performing with Hungarian kaba gaida master Dimcho Enchev and Portuguese experimentalist Vasco Alves. She's also worked with composer Genevieve Murphy and singer-songwriter Caroline Polachek.

Chaimbeul's new album *Carry Them With Us* sees her collaborate with saxophonist Colin Stetson, who she first connected with online during the pandemic. "I was thinking about what I was going to do for my album, who was going to be involved, what type of sound I wanted. And Colin Stetson was at the top of my list. I sent him a track I had been working on at home. He put some sax over it and sent it back. After that, I asked if he'd be up for being involved in my album. I owe a lot of this record to him. The sound that he has created, it worked so well with the pipes."

Chaimbeul and Stetson recorded the album last summer at Julie McLarnon's Analogue Catalogue studios in Manchester. "It was really natural, organic, from the outset. It was like, 'yes, this is what I wanted it to sound like.' We talked about the saxophone being an extension of the sound of the pipes. I wanted it to be one whole sound, especially with the droney parts. I think the way Colin plays the saxophone suits the pipes so much because it's that constant tone from circular breathing. The pipes are like circular breathing but with the bellows. You can only stop the sound when you stop the air."

Layering repetitive phrases over drones, Chaimbeul and Stetson create shimmering textures that fuse folk and minimalism. "I'm getting more and more drawn to the trance-like quality of the pipes," Chaimbeul remarks. "I feel like the best way to hear that is that minimalist repetitive thing, which I got a lot more into on this record. A lot of them are old songs. So "Tha Fonn Gun Bhi Trom: I Am Disposed Of Mirth", it's actually a waulking song [to be sung while working cloth]. The start of that is just that one line, going round and round on that, building up the drone harmony around the melody. It's moving away from the typical set structure in piping where you'd have the strathspey into a reel, four tunes in one."

The album title references the South Uist storyteller Iain Sheonaidh Smus. If he didn't want to tell a particular story, relates Chaimbeul, he'd say he hadn't carried it with him that day. While she doesn't consciously think of herself as a tradition bearer, her music is deeply informed by her research into Gaelic folklore. "I started looking at songs that are connected to stories," she says. "Storytelling in Gaelic culture is so precious and fundamental, and I feel like it hasn't moved forward like the singing or the tunes have. And then on top of that, I was getting into that trance atmosphere, really thinking about the drones, how they carry the tune. That feeling of going round and round the same melody. I was drawn to tunes that naturally felt like that, didn't really have a resolution."

To reflect the piping tradition's profound connection to song, Chaimbeul sings on several tracks. "All the traditional material I used comes from songs, so the idea was to use my voice as an added texture, rather than thinking of it as singing this song. The words in "Piobaireachd Nan Euan: The Birds", that's all vocables. It's meant to imitate the sound of a swan far away. In Gaelic folklore there are songs about the language of birds, often using Gaelic vocables to imitate birds. It's as if the language of birds and Gaelic are so close that you could communicate. I love that idea." ○

Brighde Chaimbeul's *Carry Them With Us* is released by Glitterbeat

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DG

Venues and labels in Northern Ireland's capital are thriving in political limbo via collective action and dogged perseverance

By Brian Coney

"I regularly forget how exciting Belfast is, until I visit other places," says Michael Bonner, creative producer of clued-in Northern Ireland promoter Moving On Music. "It's easy to think 'proper cities' do it so much better, but it's not the case. There's kinship and possibility all over the place here, and an eagerness to make things happen."

Since 1995, Moving On Music's small team has braved political stasis and archaic licensing laws to put outliers and outsiders centre stage. Whether at one-off events or their annual jazz festival Brilliant Corners, their mission converges with a community raised on the knowledge that progress in Belfast calls for perseverance above all else.

In a country which currently has no functioning government, an infrastructure to support creators is much needed. So Belfast being awarded its City of Music status by UNESCO in 2022 was well-timed. One week later, Robocobra Quartet, whose jazz motivated yet punk informed craft has taken them around the world, won an award at the Northern Ireland Music Prize. Their album *Living Isn't Easy*, with its deft takedowns of daily mundanity and wellness culture, flipped the script on a competition that has traditionally honoured conventional singer-songwriters. As Robocobra Quartet's Chris Ryan sees it, breaking new ground while biding one's time are not mutually exclusive. "I remember reading about Devo perfecting their craft in relative obscurity starting out in Akron, Ohio," he reflects. "It allowed them time to develop their own musical voice and make costumes and short films before the record labels in New York took any notice of them. I feel like we were afforded the same kind of incubation time to just experiment and create art in Belfast for a long period before getting involved with agents, management, etc, which I think gave us a stronger artistic voice ultimately."

Much like Limerick across the border, modern Belfast has a tight-knit DIY spirit that can falter in a city the sheer size of Dublin. The same collectivism that has made 1980s and 90s spaces like The Warzone and David Holmes's Sugar Sweet night the stuff of mythos now endures in new forms. It's felt present at recent shows across the city: Unbelievable Lake's meld of sitar and weighty drones at McHugh's, the Beefheartian sturm und drang of Blue Whale at The Deer's Head.

Co-existing with the live music realm is an electronic community whose ambition has made AVA a festival worthy of the world stage. Meanwhile, the city's newest record shop Sound Advice is thriving in The Banana Block, a new events space in East Belfast. Helmed by Marion Hawkes, who co-founded the LGBTQ+ night Ponyhawke in 2015, its popularity beyond the city centre is meeting the demands of a city-wide scene where established and fast-rising producers pull together at spaces like Ulster Sports Club (USC) and The Hack Club. While the city's dance music heritage may still carry a certain prestige, contemporary events including Holmes's God's Waiting Room and techno trailblazer Phil Kieran's Leatherette underline the pure-cut magic of the present moment.

Record labels are also seizing the moment. Belfast imprint Touch Sensitive released one of the best Irish albums of 2022, Cork musician Elaine Howley's *The Distance Between Heart And Mouth*. Helmed by Mark Reid, its release schedule this year includes *Mermaids*, a new album by Leitrim based, Ukrainian born musician and sound artist Natalia Beylis. An early listen reveals a career peak of rapt ambience that, while not strictly Belfast-made, speaks to a neighbourly, all-island scene that looks to its creative community as more than some secondary alternative.

Meanwhile, a new monthly experimental night Handmade Music is taking over Accidental Theatre. Co-curated by Moving On Music and Sonic Arts Research Centre – whose Sonic Lab was opened by Karlheinz Stockhausen in 2004 – its inaugural outing included improv magi Barry Cullen and Son Zept. Their *New Ireland Chrome* EP is a searing soundtrack to what McCartan has called an imagined futurist Ireland. Spanning rave, acid, braindance and far beyond, it has absurdity and self-assurance in every warped bar.

As co-host Michael Bonner sees it, the latter is something that Belfast's musical contingent are fully entitled to. "What good comes from repetitive self-deprecation?" he asks. "The underdog thing only works for me if we don't acknowledge it, or better still, push against it. Otherwise, we're underselling ourselves. Our artists are world-beaters. We've confidence and humility. We've ambition and kindness in abundance. Underappreciated? Maybe. Undersupported? Definitely. Underdogs? Nah." ○

Barry Cullen plays the inaugural Handmade Music event, February 2023

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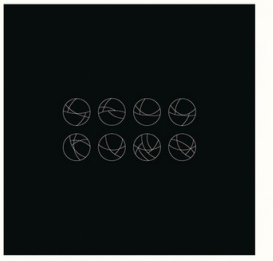

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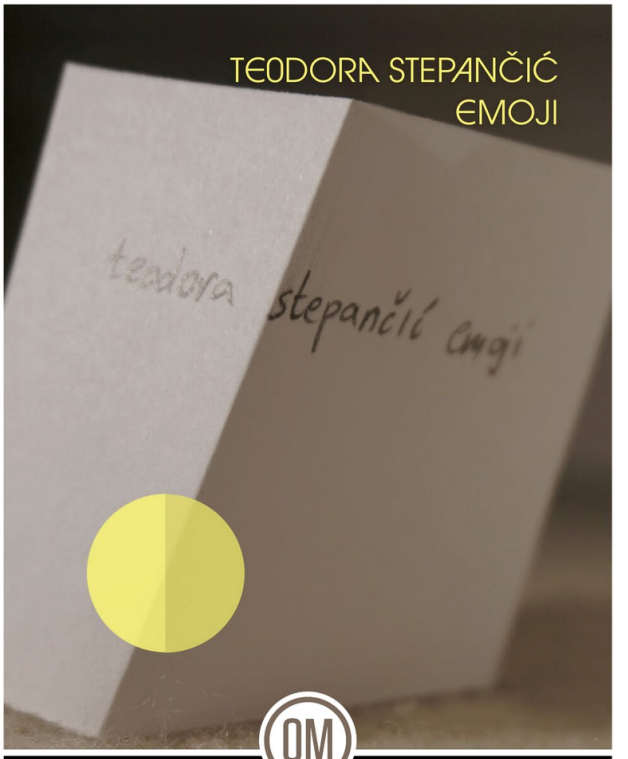

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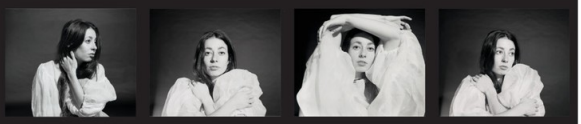

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This month's artwork selected by Ben Ponton
Album design by Big Jobs Inc

The Damned
Damned Damned Damned
Stiff 1977

The ballpoint pen autograph defacing the back of my copy of the first Damned album means far more to me than the album sleeve itself. It's a scrawl that metaphorically says to me: "You woz here."

Damned Damned Damned was the first album to be released by a British punk band, beating The Clash and The Sex Pistols by quite a margin (in 1977, to a teenager, a few months was equivalent to about two years in the normal passage of time). I can't remember if it was in *Sniffin' Glue* or *Sounds*, or who drew it, maybe Savage Pencil, but there was a cartoon that year of someone's head exploding with a caption that read something like "Things are moving so fast, I can't keep up", which perfectly encapsulated the moment. If you were on pocket money, there was no way to keep up with the next essential punk single.

As well as releasing the first punk album, The Damned already had silver in the trophy cabinet, having the previous year released the first UK punk single, "New Rose". But more crucially for me, they were also the first punk band to play live in Newcastle. T Rex were on tour promoting *Dandy In The Underworld* and Marc Bolan, laudably in hindsight, had asked The Damned to be their support band. The tour arrived at Newcastle City Hall on 10 March 1977 where the 30 or so of us making up the entire Tyneside punk contingent braved the glitter-sprinkled cheesecloth and mirror foil-adorned top hats of the Bolan disciples filling the rest of the venue to crowd the front of the stage and jump up and down to the much more important half-hour set of The Damned's Captain Sensible, Dave Vanian, Rat Scabies and Brian James.

At that time, music was becoming pretty polarised. The militant position adopted by many punks, for whom the safety pin was the emblem of the future, was that all rock music prior to The Ramones was a dinosaur to be rejected and scorned, especially glam royalty like T Rex. So me and my mates made our way down to the basement bar after The Damned's set finished, where we found Rat Scabies in a far flung corner behind a pint. I had brought my copy of the album with me on the off chance I could get it autographed and humbly asked him to sign it, which he did with a scrawl that I very much doubt he signed cheques with.

Mine was one of the first 2000 copies that, legendarily, had a photo of Eddie & The Hot Rods 'misprinted' on the back cover, which to my immense pride, Scabies – "Can we call you Rat?" – said was the first one that he'd actually seen. Then he berated us for hanging around downstairs when we should be in the hall watching Bolan. Confused by that, we left and went home. Marc Bolan died in a car crash seven months later. Just the other day, I discovered my :zoviet*france: bandmate Mark Warren was at the very same gig. ○

Ben Ponton is a founding member of :zoviet*france:. The group plays Intonal festival in Sweden this month: see Out There

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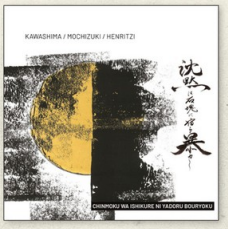

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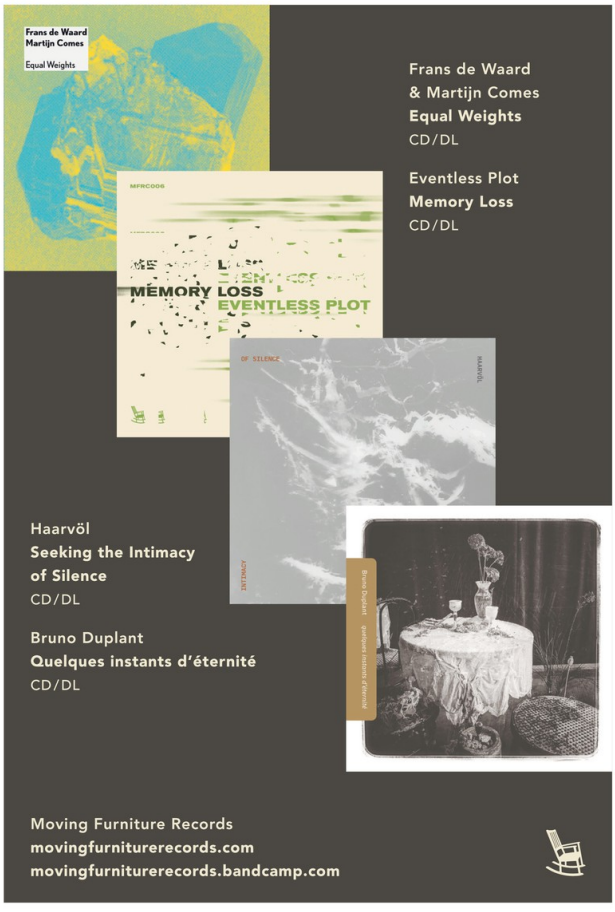

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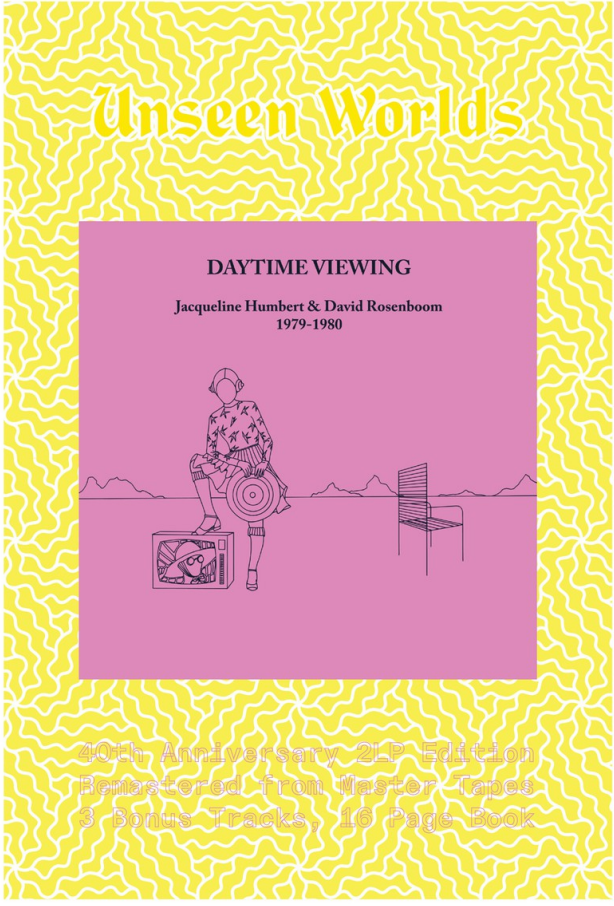

Invisible Jukebox: Tatsuya Yoshida

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear

Tested by James Hadfield
Photography by Go Itami

Tatsuya Yoshida in Tokyo, February 2023

Tatsuya Yoshida has been a crucial figure in the Japanese rock underground since the 1980s. Born in 1961, he grew up in Iwate Prefecture in northeastern Japan, where he started out playing drums in his high school's brass band and nurtured an abiding love for progressive rock. After moving to Tokyo to attend design college, he fell in with the live music scene, playing in punk and alternative acts including Phaidia and YBO2.

In 1985, he formed Ruins, a bass-drums duo whose stripped-back format belied the maximalist assault of their music, defined by Yoshida's dizzyingly complex drumming and operatic vocals. They caught the attention of John Zorn, who tapped Yoshida to play in multiple projects and later released several Ruins albums on his Tzadik label, some including guitarist Derek Bailey as Derek & The Ruins.

By then, Ruins were just one of the many units Yoshida was involved in, ranging from psych rock power trios Mainliner and Musica Transonic to a cappella vocal group Zubi Zuva. Yoshida's obsession with Magma, already audible in Ruins, reached its fullest expression with Koenjihyakkei, a zeuhl ensemble named after the Tokyo neighbourhood where he has lived since the 80s. A tireless collaborator, he has worked frequently with Keiji Haino, Makoto Kawabata, Natsuki Kido, Mitsuru Nasuno and Seiichi Yamamoto, among others.

Yoshida has been fiercely self-sufficient throughout his career, releasing much of his music on his Magaibutsu label. After going through four different bassists with Ruins, he continued as a solo project, Ruins Alone, though in recent years he has also reconvened with old bandmate Ryuichi Masuda, as well as performing with saxophonist Ryoko Ono as Sax Ruins. Other current projects include longrunning avant prog band Korekyojinn and an improvising duo with keyboardist Risa Takeda. Koenjihyakkei's third album *Nivraym* was recently released in a newly remastered and reworked edition by Skin Graft.

The Jukebox took place in Koenji, Tokyo.

Zamla Mammaz Manna
"Smedjan"
From *Famijlesprickor* (Impulse!) 1980

TY Ah, right. This is Zamla. Zamla Mammaz Manna [aka Samla Mammas Manna].

JH **When did you first hear them?**

TY I think I must have been about 20 at the time. I started listening to prog rock when I was around junior high school age, but I was out in the countryside – Iwate – so there wasn't as much information available as there is here [in Tokyo]. So it was things like Yes, King Crimson, Camel, Genesis and Gentle Giant. I discovered the European bands like Magma and PFM after I graduated high school and came to Tokyo. It took me a little longer to get on to groups like this. They had quite an impact on me: it was different from the prog coming out of the UK and France.

JH **Where do you think that difference came from? The Swedish folk influence?**

TY That's right. It feels like they absorbed things like folk music and then put their own spin on it.

JH **And you also ended up becoming a member of the reunited Samla Mammas Manna in the early 2000s, right?**

TY I did! We did a few tours in Japan and also played in North America and Europe a bunch of times. On the whole, we didn't play any new songs: it was material from the past, mixed with improvisation. I was using a sampler at the time, so I'd drop in some Japanese mood kayō [mood music], *Tensai Bakabon*... it's a manga by Fujio Akatsuka, and an anime. I sampled the theme tune from *Tensai Bakabon*, and I'd play it in the middle of an improvisation.

JH **I played this track because there's a strong element of humour in Zamla's music...**

TY Yes, definitely.

JH **... that's also something that comes through in your own.**

TY Yeah, that's been part of what I do since way back. I'd get a kick out of doing something slightly ridiculous in the middle of a really heavy song. It's something that [Zamla] and I have in common.

Maureen Tucker
"Bo Diddley"
From *Playin' Possum* (Trash) 1982

TY [After about 30 seconds] Are there any vocals in this?

JH **Do you have an idea about the era?**

TY It feels like something from the 1970s. I might have heard this before, but I'm not sure what it is. Captain Beefheart? Who is it?

JH **It's Maureen Tucker, from The Velvet Underground. This is her 1982 solo album...**

TY Oh, Maureen Tucker. I don't know this at all. To be honest, The Velvet Underground's kind of music doesn't do much for me.

JH **I guess it's very minimal and repetitive. Is that why it doesn't grab you?**

TY Right. That's also why I don't have much interest in krautrock. I can understand the appeal, but I'd rather play – and listen to – music that has a sense of progression.

JH **Her drumming is the polar opposite to your own style, which is very complex and tight. Did you always play like that?**

TY Well... [long pause] the way I play now is still quite similar. Over the years, it feels like I've become increasingly precise and sensitive, rather than just relying on power. When I started playing with jazz musicians, I became more conscious about volume control, so that broadened my approach. But I've been using a lot of toms and playing in irregular time signatures since way back.

JH **Did that come from listening to prog?**

TY Right, right, right. I was accumulating all these complex metres before I started writing my own material, so when I did, [the songs] naturally came out in 7/5 or 7/8. They came as naturally to me as writing in 4/4.

JH **So they're called irregular time signatures, but to you they're just regular?**

TY As far as I'm concerned, that's what a straight rhythm is.

Moraz-Bruford
"Any Suggestions?"
From *Music For Piano And Drums* (Editions EG) 1983

TY There's a hint of classical in the phrasing, which makes me think the players aren't Japanese. But it isn't really jazz, either.

JH **It's from 1983. Both musicians played in a well-known 1970s band – not at the same time!**

TY Oh, are these prog people? It's not Bill Bruford, is it? Bill Bruford and... OK, I don't know who the keyboard player is.

JH **It's Patrick Moraz. You were talking about how your playing changed when you started performing with jazz musicians. How did that come about?**

TY I think I played with Poo-Sun first... that's [pianist] Masabumi Kikuchi.

JH **Oh, this was Slash Trio?**

TY Yes. The bassist, Masaaki Kikuchi, was [Masabumi Kikuchi's] nephew. He was really into my stuff, including Ruins, and was playing electric bass in that style. He played some Ruins to Masabumi and encouraged him to form a trio together, which is how it got started. I think Masabumi was around 60 at the time, and he was eager to try something different. I'd play a phrase or one of my own pieces – really tight, in a complex time signature – but whatever I did, he'd come back with something that swung. That's what made it interesting.

JH **Do you see a big distinction between jazz and rock?**

TY For me, they aren't so far apart. They're like individual ideas that I might incorporate into a piece when I'm writing music. The thing I don't like about jazz is the format: there's a theme, solos, then back to the theme. Then when you watch a jazz gig, and someone will take a break after playing a solo... [laughs] I hate that! I enjoy it more when everyone is engaged, and the music keeps progressing.

JH **Did you listen to much jazz in the past?**

TY I didn't then, and I don't now.

JH **So if I was to ask your favourite jazz drummer, you wouldn't have a response?**

TY There isn't anyone. With rock drummers, too, it's not the drumming that interests me: I'm more drawn to the music. I'm not a drum geek. I'm more interested in the pieces, so I like drummers who also write their own material.

JH **When you're in a duo with a keyboardist, does it take you to different places than playing with a bassist or sax player?**

TY It does, but it's not so much about the differences between instruments, it's about the performer. I've been playing in quite a few duos recently, but with each person it's completely different. Doing a duo with saxophone is fun, but it's hard to sustain for a long time. Keyboardists have both the right and left hand, so they're able to cover more ground. As a duo, it's easy for us to switch things up, so even though there are only two of us, we can play a couple of sets without running out of steam.

Inuhiko
"Tiritiri"
From *Sake Ga Aru Nara Sake Motte Koi* (Enban) 2011

TY Jon [aka Jon The Dog]?

JH **That's right.**

TY Inuhiko?

JH **Exactly, Jon The Dog aka Shoko Uehara, alongside Gauze drummer Hiko.**

TY Did they make a record? Oh, of course they did...

JH **It's not a great recording.**

TY I don't know... as far as Jon's recordings go, I'd say this sounds pretty clean!

JH **They made a few albums. I saw them live at the time, and it was quite something.**

TY I'm surprised to hear [drummer] Hiko playing so straight! I thought it was much scrappier when they did it live! I guess it depends on the song.

JH **What's it like to play with her?**

TY It's a little different. Even with a song like this, I'll take a slightly different approach: doing various kinds of tom fills and using the cymbals more, rather than eighth note beats. I've also been doing a duo recently with Jon where she's performing without the [dog] costume, as Shoko Uehara. It's improvised, and she's doing an organ-style sound on a Casiotone [keyboard], but it's more... she calls it 'lo-fi scum punk improvisation'. That's fun. She doesn't sing like this – it's more like shouting.

JH **I think 'scum' is only used as a genre name in Japan. I guess it gets referred to as noise rock sometimes...**

TY So it's not as widely used as lo-fi?

JH **I think scum falls within the lo-fi bracket.**

TY Oh, I see!

JH **When you're playing with somebody whose music is as different from your own as Jon's, does it require a big shift in approach?**

TY I'm not so sure about that. I'll respond using whatever's in my vocabulary, and there's a bit of scum in there, too. I was part of the same scene as people like eYe [aka Yamataka Eye] during the 80s, doing various different projects, so I can have fun playing in that kind of scum style. If I'm doing it myself, I like to inject a slightly more technical element into it... though I guess it isn't scum anymore then.

JH **Technical scum! You're a genre unto yourself. Obviously Hiko is the ultimate in hardcore drummers, but Ruins have often been described as mixing prog with hardcore.**

TY Yeah, people have written that. I don't listen to hardcore at all... because I was into prog. But I really liked the energetic power of punk and hardcore bands, so I tried to incorporate that with prog structures.

Naked City
"Perfume Of A Critic's Burning Flesh"
From *Torture Garden* (Shimmy Disc) 1990

TY Naked City with eYe, right? Is this live?

JH **Yes, this is *Torture Garden*.**

TY Oh, *Torture Garden*? I think I played on this.

JH **No, it's Naked City's *Torture Garden*...**

TY We did a Japanese version of this song, in a unit called Torture Garden.

JH **Right. This has a lot of the energy you talk about. Very intense – too much to take in all at once – which can also be true of Ruins. Where do you draw the line? When is it too much?**

TY There's no such thing as too much. I feel like I need to do even more... not with a piece like this, but in my own music.

JH **Are you constantly pushing the limits?**

TY That's right... Sometimes I can't keep up!

JH **John Zorn used to live in this area, right?**

TY Yeah, he had an apartment on the south side of Koenji. I guess this was in the mid-80s, maybe the first half of the decade? He came to Japan and was buying up lots of records by Japanese indie bands, as well as old kayōkyoku and stuff, which is how he first heard Ruins. The first thing we did together was [Zorn's Ornette Coleman project] *Spy Vs Spy*. I got invited to play in a Japan version of that group.

JH **Tzadik released various Japanese underground artists in the 90s, which was part of a wider surge of overseas interest. Was Zorn a pivotal figure in all that?**

TY It was thanks to John Zorn. He put a lot of music out there, and he made arrangements for people's travel expenses when they went to New York. He really contributed a lot.

JH **So did he lose interest in Japan?**

TY Nowadays, he's a bit... yeah, you could say that. I think Japan's gone downhill. But I'm talking about things other than music.

JH **More on a societal level?**

TY Something like that.

JH **There was such an outpouring of adventurous music from Japan during the 80s and 90s. What was driving it?**

TY Why was that? It was that kind of period. Prog had finished – in a manner of speaking – and new wave was over, so it was like we felt we had to come up with something fresh. But I wasn't conscious of it at the time. There was a lot of interesting music coming out of the underground in other places too. It wasn't just Japan – I think there was a mutual influence.

JH **Yeah, I've heard about all the cassette trading that went on.**

TY Also, it felt like barriers between genres gradually came down during the latter half of the 80s. You started to get people synthesising different genres together – prog, jazz, punk – and turning them into something else.

JH **Naked City seemed to stick it all in a blender.**

TY Right. John wasn't really a hardcore guy. He liked the music, but it wasn't part of his make-up, so he'd get eYe to take care of that side of things.

Eli Keszler
"Simple Act Of Inverting The Episode"
From *Stadium* (Shelter Press) 2018

JH **[After a few minutes] Any thoughts?**

TY I've no idea. It feels recent.

JH **This is New York based artist Eli Keszler. He plays with various electronic artists, but this is a solo recording.**

TY Oh, so it's using overdubs?

JH **He plays kit, but with electronics. Recently, he's been using an interface called Sensory Percussion, which involves attaching sensors to the drum heads. You've supplemented your kit with electronics for a long time, right?**

TY I use electronic drum-type stuff quite a lot, but I don't want to get deeply into using sensors or the like. It's a bit of a hassle.

JH **I heard you don't have a car – is that why you'd rather not add more to your set-up?**

TY There's that too. It's tough hauling things around! I basically use whatever drum kit they have at the venue, and it's a pain to have a lot of other gear. I used to carry around a couple of ADAT recorders and a mixer on my bicycle when I wanted to record. Carrying two of them was hard work. It was easier when I was just using a cassette eight-track or four-track.

JH **More drummers are taking this kind of electronically augmented approach nowadays.**

TY It's because the technology has become so much more compact. I'd like to do a bit more with electronics myself – I really want to try doing improvisation where it's just me and a computer, where the sequences etc change by themselves. Once it gets a little easier to do!

Keiji Haino & Charles Hayward
"Track 5"
From *A Loss Permitted To Open Its Eyes For But Three Hours And There Glimpsed Finally In Focus A Mystery That Begs Earnestly, "Ask Me Nothing" Now, Once More The Problem Is Yours Alone* (33-33) 2019

TY [After a few minutes] I don't recognise this. Is it someone I know? [High-pitched vocal enters] Is that Haino?

JH **That's right.**

Jon The Dog

James Hadfield

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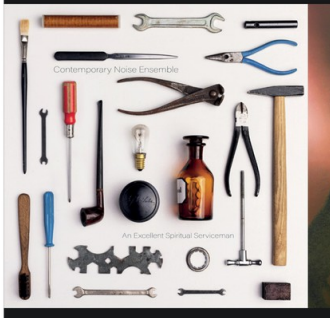

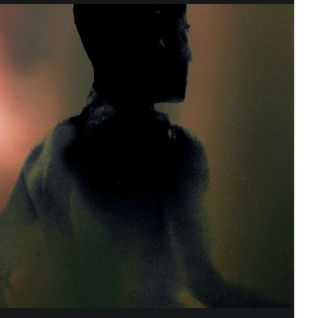

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Charles Hayward

TY What, is this Fushitsusha?

JH No. The drummer isn't Japanese, but someone you've played with before.

TY Oh, Charles Hayward?

JH You mentioned Fushitsusha, and it does have that kind of atmosphere to it.

TY It's along those lines. Maybe that's what they were going for. It would've been great if Hayward had sung on this, too.

JH Right! I don't think he contributes vocals on this one. Did he sing when you played together [at London's Serpentine Gallery Pavilion in 2009]?

TY I can't remember if he did while we were improvising together. He did during his solo set, but maybe he doesn't sing so much when he's improvising. I wish he'd done it here – Hayward's low voice alongside Haino's would've been great. They're both superb vocalists.

JH You've often mentioned This Heat as a key influence. What did you take from them?

TY The drumming was a major influence. The rhythm patterns on their recordings. The albums are best taken as a whole... there's a prog influence in there, of course, but it felt like they went beyond that. This Heat, and Magma too. I love 1970s prog and it's what I listen to, but I didn't set out to play music like that. I didn't think I could – and I didn't want to either. But when I heard This Heat and Magma, I felt I can express myself in this way, I'd like to give it a try. And that's when I started writing my own material, in my mid-twenties.

JH What were you doing before then?

TY I was performing, but not with my own band. Prog was something I listened to.

JH When you draw a distinction between Magma, This Heat and prog, what's it based on?

TY [With their music] there's this kind of energy that pours out from the centre. It's about something more than technique, and that's what I wanted to build on myself.

JH But you weren't playing with a Magma-sized ensemble as Ruins...

TY When it was just the two of us, the bass riff was the main thing. I tried adding guitar one time, but it felt more convincing without – like we were cutting right down to the core – so I decided to carry on with Ruins as a duo.

JH The story I heard was that the guitarist didn't turn up to your first rehearsal.

TY That's not how I remember it. I think we started as a duo and then tried it with guitar, but it felt better without. It wasn't so much about freedom, [the guitar] seemed superfluous. We were going to cut things down to the core, then the rest was just fighting spirit. At the beginning, it felt like we were really pushing ourselves to the brink. Our sets were only about 20 minutes – partly because the songs were so short – but getting through those 20 minutes took a lot of energy.

PoiL Ueda
"Dan No Ura (Demo)"
(Bandcamp) 2021

JH I'm interested in your impression of this.

TY This is a recent one, right? PoiL Ueda. I really rate PoiL, but I'm not so sure about this combination.

JH This is a collaboration with the singer and satsuma-biwa player Junko Ueda. I take it you haven't thought to use traditional Japanese music like this in your own work?

TY Not really. I'm more into traditional music from the West than from Japan. I love classical music, traditional Japanese music, not so much, so I haven't thought to incorporate it into my work. That said, I'm currently playing with someone like that. I'm in a band with a nohkan [flute] player called Yukihiro Isso. It's kind of like noh music in prog arrangements. There's some sho in there too. He's an amazing guy from a family of noh musicians.

JH You said you like classical music – who are your favourite composers?

TY Debussy, and Webern. Among 20th century composers, Webern is my favourite. His pieces are short, but pack a lot of information into the space of just a minute or so. I want to do something like that, but with rock. But my absolute favourite is Debussy.

JH I wouldn't have expected that.

TY Really? His use of harmony is amazing. I mean, he created things that nobody had ever done before. [Laughs as the rhythm section cuts out] This is awesome.

JH PoiL are contemporary zeuhl artists...

TY Right, right. We played at a festival together in France.

JH Obviously zeuhl is a thread that runs through your work: with Ruins and, especially, Koenjihyakkei. What do you think of an approach like this?

TY I can really relate to them musically. They're technically superb, but they also have a punk element in there, too. They're like total idiots when they play live. Their stage shows have that Frank Zappa-style sense of humour to them, but that's what makes it interesting.

Black Midi
"John L"
From *Cavalcade* (Rough Trade) 2021

TY [Listens to opening riff] I know this one.

JH You got that one quickly.

TY Black Midi. Second album? I read somewhere that the drummer likes Ruins.

JH I saw them play in Tokyo recently, and they sold out a few shows on the same night.

TY I mean, I know everyone talks about them, but I don't think this is that amazing, musically.

JH Does this sound fresh to you?

TY I don't know about fresh. It feels more like they've combined various kinds of music I've heard before. What was the capacity when they played in Tokyo?

JH About 1300 at Spotify O-East in Shibuya.

TY I wonder why they got popular. The vocal has a very distinctive colour to it, but the song itself doesn't blow me away.

JH Are you surprised that a band like this could do so well?

TY It's not so much surprising, but I find it a bit strange. If they're so big, why don't I get more people coming to my shows?

Magma
"The Last Seven Minutes"
From *Attahk* (Eurodisc) 1978

TY [Laughs] Is this the last song? I've done a cover of this.

JH Was that in the prog medley you used to play with Ruins?

TY No, this was in a Magma tribute band, but we didn't end up playing it live. There's a prog idol group that did a cover of this, you know. Xoxo Extreme. They did it with a dance routine, and they got Magma's seal of approval.

JH Have you had any contact with that Japanese idol scene? There have been noise artists who went all-in, like Hijokaidan.

TY They did, didn't they? I've shared a bill before, but I haven't done any collaborations.

JH What do you think of all that?

TY I don't have any problem with it. The idol fans who come to those shows where they perform with noise artists are receptive to what the noise guys are doing, and everyone seems to have fun.

JH With Magma, was it the overall sound that influenced you, or the drumming?

TY Yeah, that style of drumming is a bit... it's coming from jazz, so I'm not sure I could play like that even if I wanted to. It's more about the vocals for me than the drumming.

JH And singing in tongues.

TY There was that too, but I didn't go as far as creating my own language. I came up with lyrics by improvising vocals, transcribing them and then making some tweaks. I really like European languages, like Italian and Spanish, so when I improvise vocals, I'm trying to incorporate those influences and come up with something that doesn't sound like any existing language.

JH I picked this track from a period when Magma tried to sound more commercial...

TY That's right. I'm not sure about commercial, but it was drawing on Black music. They lost me a bit after this, but this album is still good.

JH Going back to what you were saying earlier about Black Midi, did you know from the start that the music you were making wouldn't sell?

TY I knew that. I didn't set out to sell records, but I'd be happy to draw a few more people in. The music I enjoy listening to myself isn't trying to be popular, so I'm just happy if my own stuff reaches people who might appreciate it. But I'd like to broaden my audience a little. I'd like to create opportunities for a few more people who might understand where I'm coming from to discover my music.

JH You've met Christian Vander. How was it?

TY It was cute. I met him in a music store in Japan. I said, your music changed my life. 'Woah!' He was wearing slippers with the Magma logo on them. ○

Polly Brown

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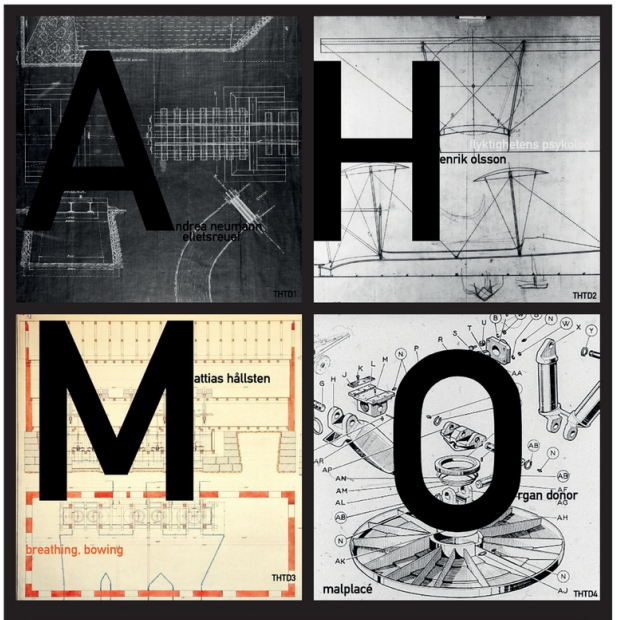

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Sympathy for the Devil

Mihály Víg

The Hungarian composer, actor and musician recalls his 40 year relationship with director Béla Tarr in advance of an epic screening

By Ilia Rogatchevski
Photography by Balázs Fromm

Sátántangó (1994) is glacial cinema. Based on László Krasznahorkai's novel of the same name, the seven hour epic is filmed in the director's signature monochrome. Long tracking shots follow a cast of characters who live on a derelict collective farm in the bleak, dystopian countryside. While relentless rains ensure the villagers' isolation from the rest of society, the people of the commune attempt to rob, screw and drink themselves out of their decaying misery.

The film is rich in detail and the music, composed by Tarr's frequent collaborator Mihály Víg, plays a central role. Extended passages of near silence, diegetic sound and sparse dialogue are punctuated by Víg's compositions, which act as characters in their own right. The opening scene, for example, in which a herd of cows vacates the barn and disappears into the fields – a single take occupying nearly eight minutes of running time – is soundtracked by low drones and pealing bells. This pessimistic leitmotif reappears at strategic points throughout the film.

Víg also plays the lead role of Irimiás, the messianic pied piper at the heart of the story. Irimiás commandeers the villagers to their eventual demise, his charisma and eloquence leveraging their fearful naivety. Over a video call, I ask Víg why Béla Tarr cast him as the lead. "It's so that it isn't obvious from the beginning that Irimiás is a dictator," he explains, referring to his own natural charm. "So that it's easier to believe everything the dictator says is true. You need a character who you can believe in."

The same events, particularly in the first half of the feature, are shown from different characters' perspectives. The repetitive nature of this device, along with the episodic chapters that dissect the plot, echo the steps of the tango.

The dance metaphor takes on a literal form about halfway through. Paralysed by Irimiás's imminent arrival, the members of the commune congregate at the pub. The music coaxing them into their inebriated dance with the devil is an absurdly long and repetitive accordion number that rattles around in your mind for days afterwards.

Sátántangó took four years to produce, because filming could only take place in the spring or autumn. The trees had to be bare and the earth sodden with rainwater. Scenes set outside were shot during twilight hours when shadows weren't present. There was no script, just Krasznahorkai's novel and Tarr's vision. Another reason for casting Víg – as Tarr admitted in an online interview – was because he needed someone who could understand the necessity for such a schedule and join the project not only physically, but mentally and spiritually too.

In the late 1970s and 80s, Víg was a prominent figure of Budapest's underground scene, playing in the bands Trabant and Balaton. Hungary was still under communist rule at this time, although in some ways the country was more relaxed than the rest of the Soviet bloc. Tarr and Víg met through a mutual friend, Zoltán Gazsi, who years later went on to serve as an assistant director on *Sátántangó*. Tarr ran a film club where you could watch films otherwise unavailable to the general public such as the works of Fritz Lang or David Lean's *Dr Zhivago* (1965). "There was a video camera and members of the club could rent it for free," Víg remembers. "Zoltán used this camera to record my concerts. He gave a tape to Béla and brought me to his apartment. Over champagne Béla asked if I would write music for him."

Sátántangó was not the first project that Tarr and Víg collaborated on. Before it came two features, *Autumn Almanac* (1984) and *Damnation* (1988). The former is a rare colour outing for Tarr. Set in a communal apartment, it explores themes of manipulation and claustrophobia. The score is based around half a dozen melancholic pieces, which are sometimes mixed under the dialogue to resemble a neighbour practising piano next door: a reminder of the external world we never get to see. *Damnation*, which chronicles the doomed affair between a barfly and a cabaret singer, saw both artists arrive at their preferred workflow. For Tarr it was long takes, a textural black and white palette and a screenplay written with László Krasznahorkai. For Víg it was finding the right sonic atmosphere – before shooting commenced – which helped to steer Tarr's vision.

How does Víg approach soundtrack composition? "I read the script," he says. "Then I try to forget everything. I stay calm and silent, waiting until something comes to mind. That's all. It works." It's rare for him to find the music immediately, but ultimately it's about tapping into the emotional centre of the story. He tends to write far more material than necessary, with only about a quarter of it making the final cut. For *Autumn Almanac*, the film was already done, but for *Damnation* and all subsequent works the music was scored first. Does he have a preference for working one way over the other? "It's the same when you have a poem and you write music to it. Sometimes you have music and you find the lyrics. It can work both ways."

Sátántangó is considered by many to be one of the most important works in cinema history. In recent years, it was remastered to 4K from the original 35mm negatives by Arbelos. Due to its length *Sátántangó* is seldom screened, but the cultural platform Digital In Berlin is set to screen the restored version for two dates this spring in an unusual setting. Several composers have been invited to contribute to a new live soundtrack, next to Víg's score, the plan being to perform them live in the concrete hall of a former crematorium in Berlin's silent green venue. There will be no intermissions, but the audience will be encouraged to move freely around the space. The point is to experience the film with new levels of intensity. Víg will be present for both screenings. "I understood what it was all about," he says. "And I'm looking forward to seeing what will happen." ○

Sátántangó Live will be screened on 31 March and 1 April at Silent Green, Berlin: see Out There. Mihály Víg's *Music From The Film Sátántangó* is released by Arbelos

Mihály Vig in Budapest, February 2023

Dorothy Moskowitz in Piedmont, California, February 2023

False Flag Operation

Dorothy Moskowitz

Half a century after the pioneering electronic rock of The United States Of America, their otherworldly vocalist pushes into new territory

By Edwin Pouncey
Photography by Nicholas Albrecht

Now recognised as one of the most original voices to emerge during the late 1960s psychedelic rock stampede, singer, songwriter and musician Dorothy Moskowitz rose to fame as a member of The United States Of America, the Los Angeles based group she helped form in 1967 with musician and musical scholar Joseph Byrd. During their brief existence, USA became one of the leading avant garde rock groups who, alongside such contemporaries as Silver Apples, Fifty Foot Hose, Lothar & The Hand People and Beaver & Krause, were championing the use of electronics as an alternative to the plethora of electrified rock and blues acts that were dominating the late 60s music scene. The group's self-titled album was flagged up by Columbia/CBS as an esoteric work "appealing mainly to the 'underground' element of music people" – and in order to introduce their music to a larger audience, a track from the album was included in a bestselling budget price UK compilation called *The Rock Machine Turns You On* (1968). The chosen track "I Won't Leave My Wooden Wife For You, Sugar" became a cult hit, an introduction to a completely new dimension of modern music where electronic instrumentation with treated vocals and effects were looped around spiked satirical lyrics and an ending that marched out to a Charles Ives styled backbeat.

A founder member of the group, Moskovitz was simply credited on the album's press release as "lead singer" – bunched together with an all-electric ensemble that included Byrd on electronics, keyboards and calliope, violin player Gordon Marron, bass player Rand Forbes and Craig Woodson on modified drums and percussion. During their recordings, Moskowitz's vocal was electronically altered to create a suitably alien persona.

In an email correspondence about her musical life past and present, I ask Moskowitz about her initial reaction to the transformation of her voice when it was fed into a synthesizer, and how comfortable she was with the end result.

"I may have initiated it myself, when engineer and dear friend Tom Oberheim brought his ring modulator into the studio for our violinist to try," she replies. "The synth finally used on the album was built by Richard Durrett, but whenever Tom is interviewed, he mentions me. To this very day, I like to alter my recorded voice to lend an otherworldly cast to it."

55 years after the release of USA's debut, Dorothy Moskowitz has now returned with a new album *Under An Endless Sky*, by The United States Of Alchemy, a musical/lyrical collaboration project she shares with Italian electronic composer Francesco Paolo Paladino and music writer Luca Chino Ferrari, "three individualistic artists who became aesthetically intimate via internet during the spring and early summer of 2022". The trio were brought together through writer and film critic Tim Lucas's 2021 novella *The Secret Life Of Love Songs*, which came with an additional CD of original material by Moskowitz.

"We first met on Facebook around eight years ago," she recalls. "We became interested in each other's work, eventually resolving to collaborate on a complete soundtrack for his novella. We never met or spoke, but sent emails and MP3s to develop the material. We altered some of the original poetry to better lend it to singable cadence. I modified and arranged Tim's melodic drafts."

Also on board were guitarist Gary Lucas and singer/multi instrumentalist Mike Fornatale, who contributed important cameos to a project that was four years in the making. "Tim was a key figure in the genesis of *Under An Endless Sky*," insists Moskowitz,

The United States Of America, 1967: (from left) Joseph Byrd, Ed Bogas, Craig Woodson, Dorothy Moskowitz, Rand Forbes, Gordon Marron

"because Francesco heard our *The Secret Life Of Love Songs* CD and asked Tim if we'd collaborate with him." Paladino duly responded by sending a copy of his *Barene & Other Works* (2021), a recording inspired by the salt marshes of Venice, and after hearing it the creative ball was set in motion.

"His forthright experimentalism spoke to me," Moskowitz enthuses, "reminding me of my own youthful roots in the avant garde. Francesco then introduced me to Luca Chino Ferrari whom he described as his 'friend and enlightened lyricist'. Luca had authored countless books about what he termed musical outsiders, from Nick Drake to Third Ear Band, Captain Beefheart, Tim Buckley and Syd Barrett. There too, I felt a kinship with his musical tastes."

The newly formed United States Of Alchemy pieced together their combined musical and lyrical ideas, which eventually emerged as the *Under An Endless Sky* album. "All of us were cautious at the start," she says. "But by April [2022] we were like a repertoire troupe, approaching each new piece with freshness yet still maintaining our individual identities. What kept it going, even in the midst of disagreements over track length, dynamics, or even interpretations, was a climate of praise, often bordering on the flowery. The working methods, however, were more complex.

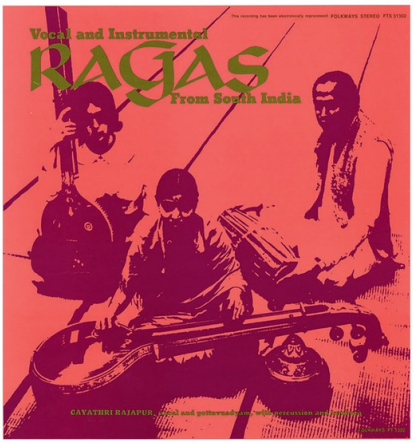
"Francesco initiated all the instrumental tracks, sometimes without getting involved in the intricacies of the words," she continues. "I was to create the melodies to float above his work, often without having the words entirely finalised. Luca wrote his poetry in Italian and some of the words and phrases in his translations needed to be substituted in order for things to sound smoother in English. In some places, I might coax blank verse into pulsed lines, so they'd match the time signature of the music. It was marvellous fun, but sometimes the deep philosophical bedrock of his work could keep me awake at night. When striving for euphony from another language, shades of meaning could be lost, so I was constantly referring back to Luca to assure nothing was butchered in the service of scansion."

I ask how she might describe the type of music that The United States Of Alchemy are involved in. "I'm not sure if it's right for me to describe The United States Of Alchemy in terms of style," she replies. "It can distance listeners from the raw immediacy of feeling that I believe we all hoped for in generating the work. When Francesco, Luca and I were in the thick of it, we felt our way through, without specifically naming what we were up to."

One distinct flashback to one of Moskowitz's previous musical lives can be heard on the album's long and winding titular opening track. "Under An Endless Sky" is a drifting, if somewhat erratic symphonic drone piece, overlaid with the singer's precise vocal, where every word is enunciated for maximum effect. The composition is reminiscent of an earlier collaboration from the early 60s, after moving to Los Angeles with her then partner Joseph Byrd, whom she met in New York, in order for him to work on his

Courtesy Cherry Red

With Country Joe & His All Star Band, early 1970s (Joe top left)



Gayathri Rajapur/Harihar Rao/Dorothy Moskowitz, *Vocal And Instrumental Ragas From South India* (1967)

PhD in ethnomusicology at UCLA. During this period she was introduced to vocalist and gottuvadyam player Gayathri Rajapur and percussionist Harihar Rao, who invited her to contribute to the recording of an album of South Indian raga music.

"Yes, that's true," she concurs when I ask if the two works are somehow entwined in time. "I think my work with Gayathri reinforced a style of composing and improvising that started back in Barnard College with some brief studies I had with composer Otto Luening. He simplified the supposed mysteries of medieval modes and their use, implying that composing wasn't supposed to be brain surgery. After college, I studied jazz piano with John Mehegan, also known for his emphasis on modal improvisation. When I finally attempted raga mastery with Gayathri, it felt like a highly complex variation of something I'd already known. All of this set the stage for the modal melodies I [later] added to Francesco Paladino's instrumentations.

"We were all pretty close friends," she recalls about her involvement with her fellow raga players. "Harihar taught North Indian music. He'd been Ravi Shankar's assistant. Joseph focused on South Indian music, largely with Gayathri, who was also our housemate.

"I also took classes with Gayathri in vocal music. It might be of interest to note that a student had to master some preliminary percussion before embarking on a melodic instrument in formal Indian training. I ended up studying tabla with Harihar, as a prerequisite to playing sitar."

The resulting album was recorded by Byrd in December 1963 at UCLA's Institute of Ethnomusicology, and eventually released in 1967 as *Vocal And Instrumental Ragas From South India*, replete with a cover that featured a group photo of the three musicians – with Moskowitz hidden behind a pair of Velvet Underground styled Ray Bans and shouldering her tamboura, which she can be heard playing on the recording.

"The tamboura is a very casual drone instrument requiring only slight technique," she explains when asked why she chose it as her principal instrument. "It's awarded to a favoured student or friend. That's how I wound up on the cover of a South Indian raga music album. Joseph produced the album in a studio on campus. He sent the master, photos and liner notes to Moe Asch at Folkways Records, whom he knew personally."

Prior to this musical adventure, Byrd and Moskowitz had also worked together on a collection of Christmas themed songs for Time-Life Records called *The Life Treasury Of Christmas Music*. "I don't recall any particular interest in holiday music," she notes. "But I do recall the commission itself was $600 for scoring and production. It seemed lavish at the time. I think that Time-Life may have asked Joseph to do it and I got to add a couple of arrangements of my own."

Byrd's eclectic passions for traditional Indian, old-timey American, electronic music and the avant garde were, according to Moskowitz, already established before they became a couple. It was these elements, along with a political stance that veered

Courtesy Bill Belmont (Country Joe All Stars)

towards the far left, that he would eventually fuse together when forming the avant rock group that they played together in.

"When I met Joseph in New York, he was in the inner circle of the Fluxus/Judson Church scene," Moskowitz remembers. "He and several of his friends had studied with John Cage and I got to know them well. I even performed in some of their concerts. They seemed to be connected to visual artists who had worked at Rutgers University with Allan Kaprow, who was known as the father of happenings."

Indeed, Byrd's idea of forming an "avant-garde political/musical rock group" to gain access to a larger audience began to materialise at a 1965 happening he'd organised involving a blues band fronted by singer Linda Ronstadt (as part of a series of concerts and events titled Steamed Spring Vegetable Pie). By 1966, Moskowitz had returned to New York after her personal relationship with Byrd had broken down, only to return to LA the following year when he asked her if she would consider being the singer of the rock group he had assembled (with fellow radical composer Michael Agnello) and provocatively named The United States Of America.

"The name The United States Of America was intended as a rebuff to mindless patriotism at a time when our country was allowing the poor to suffer, racism to flourish, and war to rage in Vietnam"

"The name was intended as a rebuff to mindless patriotism at a time when our country was allowing the poor to suffer, racism to flourish, and a divisive war to rage in Vietnam," she retorts when asked about the name. "For the cover design, I submitted a flag with distressed tendrils dripping with a suggestion of blood. Columbia dismissed it without comment.

"Joseph asked me to come back to LA and join them because they trusted me to understand their experimental approach. Probably my ticket to such trust was my faithful performance of John Cage's *Aria*. Once I got back there, I helped audition other members and collaborated on lyrics."

After recording a demo of their songs, the group were introduced to Columbia record executive Clive Davis through producer friend David Rubinson, then working for the company. Davis liked what he heard and gave them a contract.

Unfortunately, however, as Moskowitz remembers, problems soon arose between the two parties. "When Michael Agnello left, before we even signed to Columbia, the promise of theatrical mischief and provocation left with him. David grew half-hearted and Joseph felt it, eventually wanting to quit if we didn't find another producer. I let it happen."

Another record company gripe was Byrd's subversive political approach, which satirically raged through such songs as "The American Metaphysical Circus", the aforementioned "I Won't Leave My Wooden Wife For You, Sugar" and "Love Song For The Dead Ché". The title of the latter song, Moskowitz remembers, was particularly problematic for the company. "I remember a bewildering meeting with Columbia executives where it was suggested that "Love Song For The Dead Ché" might qualify as a single, if only we removed Ché's name from the title," she recalls. "It was at this same meeting that they asked Joseph and me to subtract a couple of years off our ages so that we'd appeal to a youth audience... they had no shame.

"It was easy to consider the contract with Columbia to be a first step in a public career," she expounds. "It was a thrill to record in a state of the art studio and to open for artists like Richie Havens, It's A Beautiful Day and Velvet Underground. I was naive enough to presume it would continue, but Columbia wasn't as supportive as I'd hoped."

Inevitably conflicts with their record company, coupled with in-fighting within the group, led to The United States Of America's downfall and shortly after their first and only album was released, they went their separate ways. Byrd resurfaced in 1969 with a one album project for Columbia Masterworks called *The American Metaphysical Circus* by Joseph Byrd & The Field Hippies – and several years later he recorded albums of synthesized Christmas carols and patriotic music that were released on John Fahey's Takoma label. He now teaches music history and theory as Professor Emeritus at College of the Redwoods in northern California.

For her part, Moskowitz went on to record and tour with Country Joe McDonald (the leader of West Coast psychedelic group Country Joe & The Fish) in the early 70s as part of his All Star Band. "I met Country Joe when he was visiting LA and he came to an after-gig party with Nico on his arm," she reveals. "We met again when we were on the same bill. We met a third time in a cheese store in Berkeley and shortly after that, he called me to play keyboards. Country Joe & The Fish had already established themselves as artists and I knew and liked his music before we even played together.

"When the Country Joe All Star Band folded, the drummer, Ginny Whitaker and I joined Steamin' Freeman – a gypsy rock band led by a brilliant and eccentric songwriter and fiddle player – in a quartet that played to packed houses in North Beach, San Francisco."

Among her other musical work is singing jazz standards and some of her own songs with pianist Dick Fregulia for an independently released album called *Yesterdays* (1978), as well as being involved in teaching, directing and writing music for children.

"The modulated vocals and electronic tracks on the USA album often led people to think of me as an electronic composer, but I have been serious about electronica only recently," Moskowitz confesses. "In 2018 noxious air from a deadly California firestorm confined people indoors for days. I scored a bleak spoken word soundscape about it during my isolation, using a Keystation 61 MIDI keyboard to access virtual instruments from Sibelius, a popular notation program. It encouraged me to combine GarageBand sounds with my written lines and to mix in acoustic instruments like piano or viola. I never use prefab loops. Everything is composed. With these techniques, I've since completed an entire solo electronic album inspired by the WEBB Telescope."

And, it emerges, there is currently a phantom from her past inside her machine. "At present, I have the elegant ghost of Bebe Barron floating near me as I compose," she reveals. "She and her husband Louis wrote the music for *Forbidden Planet* [1956], the first use of electronics in a film. Louis designed audio circuits – in tubes! – that had signature life cycles. They were hooked up to tape recorders and allowed to burble like babies in a nursery, each having a unique voice."

Did she ever manage to make contact with either of them, I ask? "Joseph knew the Barrons and brought me over to visit them in their LA home some time in 1964 or 65. Bebe prepared the tea and Joseph and Louis talked about electronica, with some side commentary from Bebe. I had no idea at the time that she was the primary splicer, making the creative decisions about the sounds Louis produced.

"We reconnected several years later, when The USA were playing local gigs. At that point, she had started a vintage boutique – and it was then that we became friends and talked about those magnificent tubes. Sometimes when I'm shifting tracks around from one preset to another on my humble workstation, hidden overtones can get more prominent, or rhythms may mysteriously become tonal. These are joyful surprises that I think Bebe would have adored. She once admitted to me that while she didn't know all the intricacies of 'cybernetics', or the mathematical patterning that guided the life of inorganic tubes, it never interfered with her creative process. I recall her saying: 'Let the circuitry run its course and have its own freedom.' I strive to be that open in spirit." ○

Dorothy Moskowitz & The United States of Alchemy's *Under An Endless Sky* is released by Tompkins Square

In the studio, 1988

With Dick Fregulia in San Francisco, 1978

United States Of Alchemy's Luca Ferrari (left) and Francesco Paolo Paladino

Paul Crowley (Fregulia); Maria Karini Assunta (United States Of Alchemy)

Artist and musician Damien Roach collates AI-generated samples to map the infinite complexities of the experience of sound

By Emily Bick
Photography by Yu Fujiwara

The Dream Factory

Last year, DALL-E, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion first rolled out their beta versions, with their text to image software that could, when prompted, generate any visual image that could be imagined and described in a few words. Their renderings appeared like magic, conjured by speech acts, incantations. (You can also find curses in the magic – early results of human faces appeared like Francis Bacon horror swirls, and in the months since, faces have improved, but hands still often sport extra digits at unusual angles). Now Damien Roach, the artist, graphic and AV designer and cultural researcher who records as patten, has released the first album ever made from the results of a similar AI-driven text to sound generator, patched and reworked together into a suite of songs.

Mirage FM is a tantalising rush of textures and production tics: chopped and screwed R&B wooze, a familiar smooth pulse of hairdresser house cut with electronic skips and scrapes; the keening of pop divas and rappers, emoting syllables with no content, no relation to language. It's familiar as the spirit of radio, guiding an endless cruise, mirage-like in the sense of the infinite scroll of a million grids and feeds, in the intangibility and ephemerality of images drifting through the cloud.

Roach describes the project as "crate digging in latent space", using a record collector's dogged sensibility to sift through all of the possibilities of the improbable geometries of latent space – the topographical model representing compressed data classified by machine learning algorithms. "I wanted to find ways to communicate the process in a way that was quite understandable and not sort of tech-y," he says. "You could think of them as a sort of sound library of notional music that hasn't existed before. And on top of that, I suppose there is this strange idea with latent space. Like an almost geometric way of thinking about data that has been accumulated. And within that space, there's a mass that forms a kind of archaeology or an archive of human thought, what's been made in the past, human creativity. And also, inside that space it's possible to find wormholes between points that haven't necessarily been uncovered by things people have actually made already. There are these wild conceptual possibilities within the realm of all of the data that's been produced already."

That particular phrase, crate digging in latent space, is also interesting because of the clash between modes of categorising and searching for information. Crate diggers have their own heuristics for flicking through the bins: they might be looking for a label, a style of design, certain players lurking in the credits – I've been swayed by the odd juicy typeface. It's hard to describe the appeal of a lucky dip record: you know it when you see it. But how does that square with machine learning systems that have their own weird systems of making patterns and connections, their own unknowable heuristics? "I mean, suppose in practical terms, in both of these systems that you're talking about, the main interface is language. Words. And it's funny actually," he says, gesturing at records lying around the office of *The Wire*, where the interview is taking place, "seeing this categorisation and again thinking about the record shop, libraries, archives and how information is organised. And the way the information is organised obviously has an impact on how it's perceived and what it can possibly be, right? So if you categorise something in a specific way, it impacts what the thing is. It's like alchemy, isn't it? Linguistic alchemy, to name or to categorise is to cloak or to reveal or position something... I guess that the Venn diagram is language and words themselves. Which is interesting.

"I think that if you're working with a system that operates in a slightly mysterious way, where your usual framework of understanding and orientation breaks down, then there's an opportunity for failure, a failure of precision that could afford the uncovering of spaces – again to use that spatial analogy – that you weren't necessarily intending to seek out. Like the weird potential of a broken map."

Mirage FM was created on Riffusion, an offshoot of Stable Diffusion that adapted the latter's text to image modelling capacity to create a text to sound generating system. As a hobby project, programmers Seth Forsgren and Hayk Martiros trained the Stable Diffusion model on images of audio spectrograms of sound clips paired with text, and built a website interface where anyone can enter a string of words and generate sound samples.

Riffusion only exists because, unlike DALL-E, Midjourney

Damien Roach aka patten at the V&A, London, February 2023

or other text-to-image competitors, Stable Diffusion is an open source project, so its code is available for anyone to use or adapt. "The great thing with Stable Diffusion is that the guy who set it up, Emad Mostaque, is very ideologically driven in terms of the accessibility of artificial intelligence systems, and the importance of interrogating biases within the data sets. So a core part of the ethos of the company behind Stable Diffusion is that they wanted it to be open source, meaning that individual users could take this framework, and then apply it to whatever they wanted, and change it, develop it," Roach explains, "Within weeks, so many innovations were taking place. People are making all sorts of different APIs, different applications that could use this very, very powerful system, and it's been wild since then. Every other week you're seeing things, and thinking, well, that was the stuff of dreams, and this is now possible.

"What Stable Diffusion did has really changed the culture and the ideology behind what it means to have or to not have access to these tools, and radically opened up who can use them."

In late December 2022, shortly after Riffusion launched, Roach became fascinated by its possibilities – he had no plans to make an album, but found the idea of creating music with AI too compelling not to. "I started experimenting with it, and realised that there was a lot that could be done," he says. "I got obsessed with this thing, and made hours and hours of recordings, because it's quite lo-fi as well, it's just this website that would spit the stuff out. I was documenting it – this is another thing I've been doing sometimes, because these systems, you don't necessarily own them and you don't know if it's going to be there tomorrow. So I was making all this stuff and recording it, to return to it later, already with that knowledge that it'd be about going back, editing and finding things. I suppose the other thing too is that the majority of what was being spat out by the system wasn't what I was looking for, even with the prompts I would use, it would take a long time to find something that really pulled me into it."

What is that something, in those snippets of generated sound, that made them just right? Were there specific prompts that worked, or failed? He demurs, and fair enough. Maybe the potential for text-generated audio using AI is greater than for text-generated images, because there is no standard of photorealism to compare the results to. Or maybe language is slippery and can't be contained by the Venn diagram mentioned earlier. Music hits differently. Like the crate diggers zeroing in on treasure, you just know when it's right. Or as Roach says, "I was talking with a friend recently about the pieces of music that were the most touching. Both of us were thinking about this. And I think there's music that you can understand why you like it and you could talk about it forever.

"But I feel like the most touching things, there are no words to say why, it just does something to you. It just *does* something to you, you know? And you know there are these attributes you could point to and other pieces of music that are structurally and sonically similar, or where they sit in a historical continuum. But then for some reason, this part of this song, the way the textures and the melodies or whatever it is work together, it just hits you in a way that is pre-linguistic and it touches you as a squidgy sentient person for some reason.

"I feel like the [Riffusion] system can make things almost like pointing. Like, this is a free jazz drum solo, and this is an arpeggiated synthesizer, and this is a tabla. This is Rihanna. You can

point to all of those things. But then there's an elusive *something else* that isn't there... as someone who makes music sometimes, it was that search for something. You're playing on the keyboard, or you're playing guitar or whatever you're doing, you're working with patches and looking for something to happen, you know. It's always about that search to some extent."

After a short period of choosing text prompts and generating samples, Roach sifted and edited hours of AI-generated material, searching for bits with that elusive it-factor, before embarking on an almost forensic compositional process, deconstructing them, adding filters, delays, fades, EQ and pitch shifts, and patching everything together. The music is aided by the magic of the text box, yes, but the end result is very much one of personal sensitivity, taste and choice. "You could give someone else the same material and they would make a totally different record," Roach agrees. "I'd like to show people what it is that they're listening to, because it's hard to know, isn't it, what's intentional. There are lots of things in there, like there isn't a click or a glitch on that record that isn't meant to be there. I wanted to talk about a surface that wasn't perfect, where you can see the joints. Let's talk about the idea of a thing, an object as an assemblage of parts or something. And also the idea of engaging with music in a different way, thinking about what the musical experience can be.

"Also, in practical terms, there were a lot of limitations, in terms of how to make these into songs," he continues. "I think one of the easiest pieces to talk about in that way is a track called "Drivetime". Probably one of the straightest pieces on there. It's a techno thing... but a lot of that has been made by taking the same bit of sound and then layering it and isolating tiny bits of the frequency spectrum to give that illusion... there's a track called "In Me" where I'm juggling a smallish, shortish loop that I've created and then playing around with it like it's plasticine or something, which I love to do, but I also tried to not do that too much on the record."

Elsewhere, in "Don't Worry", he smears a disturbed, distorted horn sound into a vocal that is just about singing the words of the title. The grime cadences of the vocal in "Walk With U" are sharp and staccato, set against jolting icebergs of flutey synths – keeping a steady flow, but devoid of intelligible lyrics. There's a lot going on here, but it's hard to say what proportion of that activity is happening within the studio or inside Riffusion's models. "I did try to not get too technical about it because – how do you define too technical, you know. I did massively go in on it, but I wanted everything to feel appropriate. I wanted to use the lightest touch I could, and maybe also to kind of serve the material and try not to get in the way of allowing that material to live.

"So in that sense, there's an analogy with a sort of inverse archaeology, where you're the custodian of this data. And you're finding a way to deliver it, in both the sense of a postal delivery, but also in a maternal way, you're trying to find a way to deliver this thing. It's not you, it's not about you. So that's always been a big part of the patten project as a whole, trying to sidestep that centering of the self in making things."

Roach marvels at how far visual generative systems have come in the last nine months: "I've been surprised with the fact that you essentially have a text box that is inviting you to go and dream. It's like well, what do you want to see? It's anything you can imagine. Ask me and I'll produce it for you. And what's interesting is that what you actually tend to see out there are a lot of tropes from cinema and very familiar popular culture fused in some confident, combinative way. So it's like *Indiana Jones* on Mars or *Star Wars* in the 1920s. It's really strange. I think what's really interesting to take away from that is to look at what forms our cultural imaginary... people have been given that opportunity to dream and think of whatever they can, and those dreams are often caught up in a very specific conceptual space, which is something to think about.

"There are lots of questions about the potential of using artificial intelligence as a tool within the creative act in some way. And the possibility of it being easier than ever to make compelling images with these systems. What I am really intrigued by is the idea of – this is slightly different to the audio thing. But the idea of taking away some of the barriers to entry in terms of skill, even the financial privilege of time, to be able to sit and make something. The idea of taking all of that away as much as possible, where it's really just a person and their ideas, and that's where the value lies. These tools can be very directly used to interface with culture, not just as a consumer but as a producer of things.

"I know there are lots of complicated ethical implications when it comes to the impact that some of these systems might have. Also obviously I don't like the idea of giving our ability to make things, or to think about things, or to engage with each other and culture as a whole, to companies that don't necessarily have the same ethics or any ethics. And it relates to Instagram, to Twitter, to the internet as a whole. That's an existing conversation that then continues – we can't pretend that it's all bright skies and utopia with AI."

Another thing to consider with generative AI is how much the weight of history comes in. Will it become more difficult to produce truly new sounds if AI tools can only generate responses based on material in their training data set? While there's a lot to be said for plunderphonics and sample based composition, surely the novelty of an inundation of whatever the sonic equivalent of *Indiana Jones On Mars* is will wear off fairly quickly.

But AI can be used to piggyback on recognisable sonic tics, as it outputs bits of the cultural language of music that are ubiquitous, agreed on in their labelling terminology. Roach mentioned Rihanna, and there are pop diva vocals that emerge on some tracks with recognisable timbres and styles. Even if there aren't words that are intelligible, they feel familiar, but also uncanny. "I don't think this is like a dance music record," he says, "There's something exciting about musical formulas, in that certain musical formulas are so powerful that they will allow you to like you say piggyback, or use them as a trojan horse, for all kinds of weird sonic stuff. Like hiphop or techno or whatever are really good for that. Like really powerful carrier signals. A ballad, even. If you listen closely to a Drake song, there's some pretty weird stuff going on, buried in the background, you know?"

"You're finding a way to deliver the data, in both the sense of a postal delivery, but also in a maternal way. It's not you, it's not about you"

There's also a human dimension to *Mirage FM* that continually makes itself felt, beginning with the glossy, almost vaporwave fantasy image of a red 1980s sports car enveloped in a swirl of exhaust on the cover (itself produced with the assistance of AI). From the emphasis on the idea of drivetime, and the sense of propulsion, tuning in to a radio playing familiar and ephemeral pop songs, to the feeling of being there, alive in a body, cruising through time and space and memory, there's a tension between that form of experience and the disembodied data collection and connection of the AI.

"It's really important to bring up this thing of siting the whole album within the logic of the idea of radio, and also the listening that takes place in a car or while you're doing something else," says Roach. "This cloud based way of being, it's like osmosis. I think what you could say is that the information, the artefacts like music, words and images that people throw into the stream of *stuff* we call culture, are traces of those behaviours. It's like what's there in the space between all of the things in the museums and in books, in films and in the record racks. And like radio waves, still travelling through space, forever... in the space between all those things is a sketching out of our lives, of what it is that we do, what we dream, and what we feel."

In that latent space there is infinite humanity to be excavated, infinite crate digging to be done. ○

patten's *Mirage FM* is released by 555-5555

Maria Chávez / Mariam Rezaei / Victoria Shen

A new three-way live turntable project nurtures values of cooperation and coincidence away from the ruthless sphere of DJ culture

By Emily Pothast
Photography by Amina Gingold, Damien Maloney & Kuba Ryniewicz

Force the Hand

The apartment where Victoria Shen (aka Evicshen) lives and works when she's not on tour is filled from floor to ceiling with virtually every kind of tool, raw material and electrical component imaginable. After giving me a tour of the apartment, she takes me to the roof of her building just in time to see the last vestiges of an aggressively beautiful San Francisco sunset slip behind the hills. As we walk, a metallic boinging sound suddenly emanates from Shen's face. "I'm trying to learn jaw harp," she explains, as she demonstrates how she can make it sound almost like techno by twanging it very quickly.

Trained as a visual artist, much of Shen's sound art practice stems from her love of objects and an insatiable curiosity about their physical and material properties. Before she moved back to the Bay Area from Boston, where she attended college and subsequently worked for several years, Shen had begun to build her own speakers, which eventually led to building her own turntables and casting her own records out of resin. One such record is *The Hair Gag* (2021), a split release with Aaron Dilloway, created by splicing together half a record by each artist, taking a mould, and then casting them as a single resin LP with a real zipper embedded in the resin. Another of Shen's handmade records is an amalgam of three records which play at three different speeds, stacked atop one another like a step pyramid. It is designed to be played using Shen's Needle Nails — a set of stylus-wired acrylic fingernails which transform the human hand into a pluriform playback device. In *The Wire* 467, Rob Turner hailed her nails as "a breakthrough in extended technique".

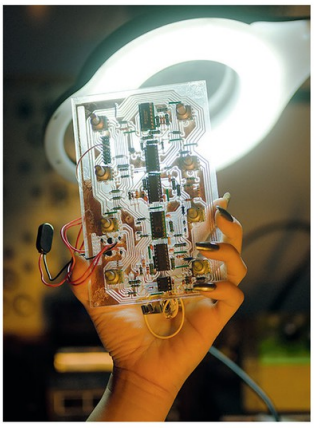
When Shen posted a short clip demonstrating her Needle Nails on social media, they garnered a lot of attention, including from Beyoncé's art team, which stole the idea and incorporated it into a promo video without permission (for which they later apologised). More importantly, however, the clip piqued the curiosity of two of the world's most accomplished experimental turntablists – Maria Chávez, the Brooklyn based multimedia artist who literally wrote the book on abstract turntablism, and Newcastle based composer, writer and educator (and occasional *Wire* contributor) Mariam Rezaei, one of the most technically adept and creatively daring artists to use the turntable as a musical instrument.

In November 2021, all three artists participated in an online conversation for Rezaei's podcast *These Are The Breaks* (also the title of her upcoming book). It begins with them geeking out about gear and grows more vulnerable as they bond over their experiences as children of immigrants and as women of colour forging their own paths in a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist society. They discuss isolation – which Shen calls "the death of creativity" – and the need to overcome it with camaraderie. Their excitement at having found each other is palpable.

This month, the trio debut a live collaboration in the form of two performances co-commissioned by Counterflows in Glasgow and Rewire in The Hague. For Chávez, who is just beginning to perform again after a four year medical sabbatical during which she recovered from brain surgery, the significance is historic. While there have been memorable live experimental turntablism collaborations in the past — like the 2002 Turntable Hell tour, which featured group jams from the likes of Martin

# of Chance

Itchy fingers: (clockwise from top left) Victoria Shen, Mariam Rezaei, Maria Chávez



Victoria Shen in San Francisco, February 2023

Tétreault, Otomo Yoshihide, Marina Rosenfeld, Lepke B and Janek Schaefer, never before have "femme-identified individuals from different backgrounds" come together in this way, on their own terms. "There's not a single white person in all of this, and I really think that in itself is such an extraordinary thing to present in front of people," Chávez tells me over Zoom. "It might just be a big bunch of noise, but at least we get to exist together safely and make art in a time where, 40 or 50 years ago, we would have never even been allowed to share our work, let alone interact with each other or even be in spaces like these art and music places that we all perform in regularly now. I'm just really honoured and excited. I think, no matter what, we're going to be making some really interesting work."

"We have no idea what's going to happen," Rezaei adds during a separate Zoom session. "We have all of these different practices coming together, and we don't know what's going to come out, but it's going to be fucking awesome."

While Chávez and Rezaei have been aware of each other's work for years, they had only recently reached out to one another in friendship, a connection spurred by both artists' participation in an online conversation hosted by Adam Parkinson at London South Bank University. "In that discussion, we talked about how we are pitted against each other," Rezaei tells me. "We don't do it to ourselves. It's just because we're women and because we have the same instrument."

Although the turntable is central to both artists' practice, the way they approach it is very different. Rezaei grew up across the river from Newcastle in Gateshead, which, as she notes, is both economically depressed and overwhelmingly white. "I was one of two people in my school that was a person of colour – and the other person was my twin brother!" A classically trained musician who now holds a doctorate in composition for turntable and ensemble, Rezaei's first instrument was the piano, which she continues to incorporate on pieces like *This World Which Is Made Of Women*, a composition commissioned by BBC Radio 3 in 2022. The foundation of this piece is a solo piano recording, transferred to Rezaei's digital vinyl system and then manipulated live using four turntables that function as MIDI controllers. The result is warped and mournful, alternatingly chaotic and spare as the music doubles back on itself, pooling into eddies and forming repetitive grooves that showcase Rezaei's astonishing ability to use the turntables to transform sound.

Works like this demonstrate why the turntable continues to be an attractive tool for experimental musicians. As a manipulable playback device based on a rotating spiral, the turntable can be seen as a sort of meta-instrument, facilitating a non-linear approach to time that resonates with the effects of memory.

"That piece is very much, for me, about the Iranian revolution – about what is happening now in Iran, about what's being continually fucking censored and erased," says Rezaei, who is Iranian on her father's side. This context was never mentioned on the radio, despite being included in her programme notes and stated in the interview she gave the station. "They commissioned the piece and they played the piece. So they allowed the narrative to come through the sound, but they didn't let me say very directly, 'This is, for me, my flag of solidarity for my sisters, my brethren in Iran."

This frustration over institutional erasure of context is echoed when Shen tells me about her *Modernist Manicures*, an art piece she performed while living in Boston. For this work, Shen spent eight months learning to give perfect manicures, culminating in a performance where she recreated paintings by artists like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko on peoples' fingernails. For Shen, who grew up as the daughter of a Cambodian refugee and then took on an enormous amount of debt for the privilege of going to art school, *Modernist Manicures* was dense with meaning. Large-scale works are rendered tiny, subverting the sublime mythos of modernism, and undermining heroic notions of medium specificity and art for art's sake. Grounded in relational aesthetics, the piece emphasised the conversations that took place during the manicures, which themselves embodied a highly gendered and racialised form of labour. While art institutions were interested in the piece, this interest tended to begin and end with "oh look, it's art on nails!" – never delving into what the work had to say about the art world's role in maintaining gender, race and class hierarchies. At this point, Shen says she "grew really disenchanted with the art bureaucracy".

In Boston, she also attended an electronics building workshop led by sound artist Jessica Rylan, whom she calls "low-key my first female role model". Shen has since carved herself a niche in the world of noise, which the art world has historically found "repulsive" and even illegitimate. At the same time, she points out, noise can be thought of as a "modernist approach to sound", insofar as it traffics in pure abstraction. "But I also think modernism is bullshit, right?" she posits. "So what is the supplemental context? It's the identity: my body, my space, the people around me, the site. I like to engage my body specifically with the sound in order to bring attention to certain qualities."

"That's the strength of noise – the unpredictability, the risk. They bring you to the present because you don't know what's going to happen next." Victoria Shen

Once, when performing in the cavernous space of New York City's Issue Project Room, she decided to crack a whip so that it would resound with a long decay time. "That was the introduction of the whip into my practice," she says. "It's a very stark, easy, cheap way to be aware of the space around you. And to feel a little bit in danger, because that is also another way to bring you into the present. I think that's kind of the strength of noise – the unpredictability, the element of risk: they all bring you to the present because you don't know what's going to happen next."

The element of chance has long been a feature of Chávez's work. In 2012, she published her influential book *Of Technique: Chance Procedures On Turntable*, filled with essays and illustrations depicting an array of abstract turntablism techniques and often consulted as a textbook on the subject. "The book is actually an inner ear album," Chávez explains. At the time of its release, she hadn't put out an album in eight years, and was questioning the status of that particular artform. "I didn't want to make an album because I just felt like the format was so boring. So then it was the conversation of, what is another form of an album? Well, there's the inner ear; the imagination of trying to imagine sound that's being described to you. So that's really what the book is. It's a how-to manual that is anti-capitalist and allows as many people as they want to create their own careers utilising these techniques. Have at it!

"All you have to do is make something new from it," she laughs. "But it's also a conceptual sound art album. If you're imagining what the sound sounds like from the essay you're reading, you're already performing the album in your mind. Then, if you take out the turntable and you set the book next to it and tear out the illustrations and make your own turntable compositions, you're literally performing the album yourself. I'm just giving you the implements and the suggestions and the techniques. But once you actively start to participate in it, whether it's in your head or outwards, then it's yours."

Born in Lima, Peru, Chávez was brought to the US as a toddler. For the first two years of her life, Chávez was deaf, until she underwent a procedure to remove water from her ears. The first sounds she heard are her first memories.

Her most formative years were spent in Houston, which was an ideal place to discover DJ culture in the 1990s. "[DJ] Screw was always on the radio, and I remember being ten years old and listening to The Geto Boys," Chávez recalls. She began experimenting with turntables at 16 and was booking her first club gigs within a year. She remembers how the sound guys would often treat her like she didn't know what she was doing – a situation that improved somewhat once she had earned a degree in audio

engineering. "I wouldn't give the degree too much credit – it was obsolete by the time I graduated because technology was evolving so quickly at the time," she says. "But it was a nice backing when I would be in performance spaces and guys would give me an issue and I would just be like, 'I have a degree in this, just give me the cables and I'll deal with it.'"

She was still in school when she encountered Pauline Oliveros's philosophy of Deep Listening. She recalls attending her first ever free jazz show: a performance by Joe McPhee and Dominic Duval hosted by David Dove, then director of the Pauline Oliveros Foundation. "From that show, I decided I wanted to work with [Dove], because I needed an internship. And from that, he encouraged me to bring a turntable to some of his practice groups that he hosted in an afterschool programme in downtown Houston." For the next five years, Chávez would regularly meet with the group to improvise and implement Deep Listening practices. Whenever Oliveros visited Houston, she would also visit them. "It was a very special time. Just a very dedicated group of young artists who were trying to learn, and we had this angel with us who would always show up at the perfect time to challenge us a little bit more."

Chávez is known for live performances incorporating both whole records and broken shards atop one another, using a specialised dual needle called the RAKE, invented by Randal C Sanden Jr. The RAKE allows for different parts of the record(s) to be read simultaneously, creating unique works of musique concrète in real time. The effect is somewhat similar to that of Janek Schaefer's *Tri-phonic Turntable* (1997) – itself inspired by Philip Jeck's multiphonic *Vinyl Requiem* (1992-93) – but with no need for multiple tone arms. "For me, turntablism is a performance practice," Chávez says. "I only do it in front of people, and it's there as a practice to keep me in a relationship and a flow with chance so that I can be further informed by how chance affects certain situations."

The use of chance is a kind of collaboration with the mysterious agency of objects: "When a record decides to break itself in a certain way, it's giving you the sample that it wants to become, if you want to think about it that way." The most valuable shards to Chávez have breaks with the spindle hole of the record intact, which helps them stay in place when they are played. "I have a few of my most valuable breaks like, if I lose these shards, it will break my heart. They're kind of like my hits. While I know what sounds will be emitted from them, I don't know what the pattern will be. So it always keeps me on my toes."

Rather than using pedals or effects, Chávez accesses the electroacoustic sculptural properties of records themselves: the terrain that lies both within their grooves and on the surface. "It's parallel to erosion," she describes. "It's geological. It's the secret language of time that leaves itself on the surface area of a vinyl record because a vinyl record is so fragile."

For many record collectors, LPs are fetish objects with an almost sacred aura. In the podcast conversation that brought them together, Chávez and Shen bond over the vitriol they have both received for having the audacity to damage records – even those with little to no economic value, like the broken ones that find their way into Chávez's possession, or that Shen ragpicks on the street. Chávez chalks this vitriol up to a "toxically capitalist" form of product worship stemming from a desire for control – the opposite of an openness to chance.

Through work in other media, Chávez often explores the physical qualities of record grooves, whether she's blowing up their sonic topography into watercolour paintings that resemble landscapes, or carving grooves into carrara marble – a material that carries centuries of art-historical weight. These visual representations of sound are a way of making her work accessible to new audiences and challenging the notion that sound art must focus on sonic emission. Shortly after we talk, she is set to return to Houston for a residency at the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, where she will be creating a site-specific sculptural environment that absorbs sound – the absolute opposite of emission.

Chávez links her approach to her philosophy on neuroplasticity, the ability of the nervous system to create new connections in response to a stimulus. She believes that ultimately, the role of an artist is to help us exercise our neuroplasticity, expanding our capacity to imagine and respond to the world around us. "It really took my time stepping away from the industry to heal that made me realise, oh, my interest has always been in exercising people's neuroplasticity over trying to get the attention of the capitalist market to promote and support my work."

Rezaei's approach to turntablism is radically different from Chávez's, but they both share an openness to chance. "You just have to accept that the turntable, by its nature as a piece of studio equipment that we use as an instrument, has flaws," Rezaei says. "What if the record skips? It's as simple as that. So I think, just on a really practical level, embracing chance is a big help. Often here the musicians say you can judge the strength of a musician's character by how they deal with a mistake. Well, what if you don't see it as a mistake, you just see it as: this is how I work? Then, I think, it's extreme and it's fantastic. It's just part of the personality of the turntable and the nature of turntablism."

She began DJing at 15 and spent years in the hypercompetitive arena of hiphop battling. While such competitions demand a high degree of technical proficiency, they can also lead to safe choices; or to the sacrifice of creativity to consistently attain a preconceived notion of perfection. They are often also sexist, with the few women who compete as turntablists expected to perform a stereotypical and commodified version of femininity.

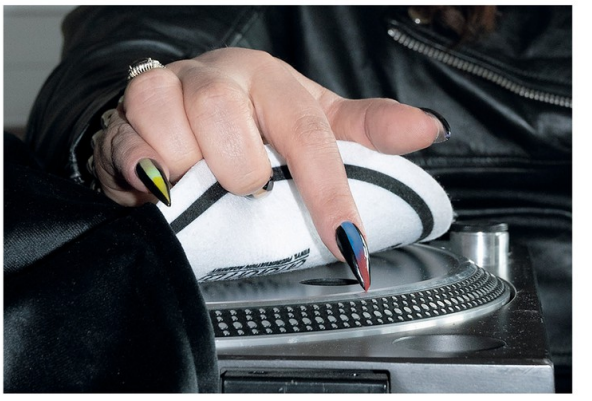
These are the elements of turntablism that Rezaei is hoping to leave behind with her "requiem for turntablism" *SADTITZZZ*, recorded live at the London Contemporary Music Festival in 2022. Another impetus for this performance came from a colleague who came up to Rezaei after her 2021 performance at the London Jazz Festival and said, "Yeah, I suppose you could be jazz." Rezaei was unamused: "I was like, what the fuck was that? Of course the fucking turntable can be jazz! Why can't it be jazz? Because jazz means free, innovative, something you've never heard, pushing into a new arena. The turntable does that really well. But I suppose that's sort of a sticking point – does the turntable really push us into a new place? And actually it can, but not every turntablist does."

The samples used on *SADTITZZZ* are drawn from unexpected places, like a few notes from a beginner trombone tutorial on YouTube. Rather than stacking beats in tidy grids or scratching in predictable patterns, she stretches and reshapes her samples beyond any vestige of recognisability. "*SADTITZZZ* is a good example of taking a sample and pulling and pushing it into a new place," she says. "How can I make the turntable sound as extreme as Roscoe Mitchell or Peter Brötzmann?"

Advance tracks from Rezaei's upcoming album *BOWN*, due out on brand new label Heat Crimes, push both the instrument and technique even further out, using the manipulation of the turntable and the sonic artefacts imparted by her digital vinyl

"When a record decides to break itself in a certain way, it's giving you the sample that it wants to become. I have a few of my most valuable breaks which, if I lose these shards, it will break my heart. They're kind of like my hits. While I know what sounds will be emitted from them, I don't know what the pattern will be. So it always keeps me on my toes." Maria Chávez

Maria Chávez in New York, February 2023



Mariam Rezaei in Newcastle, February 2023

system to break her source samples down into exquisitely stuttering facets of microtime. "I've been asked to add a track that's not as harsh," she laughs. "Which I think is quite interesting, because I'm now working on a lot of works which are very sublime, very drone, very spaced out." Although these pieces dwell in very different sound worlds, they are related in that Rezaei is always, as she puts it, "thinking of music like a musician. I have a wide range of interests and I'm going to go to what I'm interested in. I'm going to try and work out how to do it and I suppose when you do that, you get happy accidents."

For many years, Rezaei has been involved in helping to nurture artistic culture in North East England, from the founding of studio and performance space The Old Police House to serving as the current director of the Tusk organisation. "I'm someone that tries to make the weird shit happen," she declares. "The good shit." Like Shen and Chávez, Rezaei is interested in art that subverts the status quo. "I just think it's so important and so vital to us and our practice as well to just break hierarchy. Make sure that it's being broken all the time. Otherwise it's not very fucking punk, and I'm definitely into punk in that respect."

"Many DJs walk over each other to climb the career ladder. But if you have a community around you there's more work for everybody." Mariam Rezaei

Her schedule for the coming year contains a dizzying number of high profile gigs, including a tour of Scotland with the Katie Armstrong Dance Company and a co-commissioned new work for turntables and orchestra to be performed with The Frankfurt Radio Symphony in Darmstadt and The Brussels Philharmonic in Bruges and Antwerp.

However, Rezaei is also open about how the grind can take its toll on physical and mental health. Last summer, she suffered what she calls a "full 'nervous' breakdown" which forced her to take the first break she'd had in years. During this "total halt that unfolded slowly over a few days", she continually dodged a phone call from an unknown number. When she finally answered, she learned that she had won a prestigious (and economically rewarding) prize from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Both DJ culture and the avant garde music world more generally tend to operate on a principle of scarcity which keeps participants in constant competition with each other. While competition can be motivating, too much undermines creativity as artists pull each other down, in Shen's words, "like crabs in a bucket". "The competition thing's lethal," agrees Rezaei. "I'm writing about why it's the demise of turntablism. It's a shame because what often happens to a lot of DJs is they just sort of walk all over each other to climb the career ladder only to get to the top and then realise that they've got no one around them. Because if you're the very best, and you've played every festival, they're not going to have you back the next year. But if you have a community around you, and everybody wants to hear, that means there's more work for everybody. That idea of community, of coming together is something that just doesn't seem to manifest with a lot of DJs."

All three say the prospect of building community is something they hope their collaboration can achieve. "I feel like I don't see enough camaraderie in the industry," says Chávez. "And I just hope that this representation will also send a message to the industry that things are changing and people are starting to group together and protect each other and the industry should be really concerned because we're not going to be taken advantage of any more."

Shen says she hasn't quite experienced the kind of cutthroat competition Rezaei and Chávez have both endured, joking that "there's nothing but scraps in the noise world" to begin with. But in the past year her distinctive approach to experimentalism landed her a spatialised sound residency at Audium, a collaborative exhibition at Canary Test in Los Angeles with DeForrest Brown, Jr, and a slot at Le Guess Who? curated by Clipping, with whom she also recently toured. In a few days, she leaves to tour Japan; later this year she has residencies at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts and the Headlands Center for the Arts on the calendar. Shen is also collaborating with the Kronos Quartet for their 50th anniversary, working on a piece that will incorporate her custom-built turntables in order to layer live playing with playback of their own records to create a fluid temporal palimpsest.

She is delighted to be adding the trio to her "thrumming" schedule. "I'm just going to learn so much from these two women who have been doing it since they were teenagers, so hopefully they can get something out of my practice", Shen says, suggesting that there could be more to see and hear in the future. "I think it's going to be like an ongoing, developing project".

Chávez sees many directions in which the collaboration could potentially evolve. "I think we need a group exhibition in a museum, frankly, where we each have our own galleries to make our own stuff, and then we have a space that's all of us together". ○

Maria Chávez, Mariam Rezaei and Victoria Shen perform at Counterflows and Rewire this month: see Out There

Clay Pipe 15

Virgina Astley
From Gardens Where We Feel Secure (Rough Trade)

Ernest Hood
Neighborhoods (Freedom To Spend)

Imajin
Imajin (Raw Tape)

Gilroy Mere
Gilden Gate (Clay Pipe)

Tyneham House
Tyneham House (Clay Pipe)

July Skies
The Weather Clock (Make Mine)

Pink Floyd
"Cirrus Minor" (EMI Columbia)

Andrew Wasylyk
Hearing The Water Before Seeing The Falls (Clay Pipe)

Alabaster DePlume
To Cy & Lee: Instrumentals Vol 1 (Lost Map)

Eden Ahbez
Eden's Island: The Music Of An Enchanted Isle (Del-Fi)

S McLoughlin/A Cooper
Natural Lancashire/ Supernatural Lancashire (Finders Keepers)

Aminadav Aloni
Once (Dual Planet)

Lal & Mike Waterson
Bright Phoebus: Songs By Lal & Mike Waterson (Trailer)

Mike Ratledge
Riddles Of The Sphinx (Mordant Music)

Bob Stewart
The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies O (Crescent)

Compiled by Frances Castle, Clay Pipe Music, www.claypipemusic.co.uk

15 Releases To Listen To More Than Once

A Guy Called Gerald
"Bassbot" (Protechshon)

Darrell DeVore
A Song Of Civilization Up To Now (Goaty Tapes)

Flynn & Flora
"You Are Sleeping" (Independent Dealer)

Maurice Fulton Presents... Boof
Life Is Water For Gerbadaisies When They Are Dancing (Spectrum)

Jo Johnson
The Wave Ahead (Mysteries Of The Deep)

Josi Devil
Sunk Still (Innamind)

Alberto Lizarralde
Haizetxe (Hegoa)

Natural Instinct
"Nyabinghi" (3rd Party)

Nkisi
"Centripetal Vortex" (purge.xxx)

Popp
Blizz (Squama)

Alban Schelbert
Candid III (Präsens Editionen)

ssabae
azurescens (Few Crackles)

Noyeahno
"Pushing Percussion" (Rag & Bone)

Brazil: The Blowing Dance – Kuikuro Flutes And Clarinets
Various (Ocora)

David Wojnarowicz
Cross Country (Reading Group)

Compiled by Mana Records, www.manarecords.com/

Shitmat Top 15

Bryan Lewis Saunders
Near Death Experience (Erratum)

P-Model
In A Model Room (Warner Brothers)

Charanjit Singh
Synthesizing: Ten Ragas To A Disco Beat (His Master's Voice)

Guttersnipe
My Mother The Vent (Upset The Rhythm)

Venetian Snares
Making Orange Things (Planet Mu)

Black Lace
Party Party (Telstar)

GFOTY & Spinee
Dog Food (PC Music)

The Bohman Brothers
Back On The Streets (Peripheral Conserve)

Pierre Henry
Machine Danse (Phillips)

Hatebeak
Number Of The Beak (Reptilian)

Flying Testicle
Space Desia (Charnel)

Spike Jones & His City Slickers
Spike Jones Murders Them All... (RCA)

Karl Matthews
"Shane Ritchie" (Core Sounds)

Frank Zappa
Jazz From Hell (Barking Pumpkin)

The South Yorkshire Mick Hucknall
Their Eyes Light Up When I Walk Into The Room (Bandcamp)

Compiled by Shitmat, shitmat.neocities.org

The Office Ambience

Adjunct Ensemble
Sovereign Bodies/Ritual Taxonomy (Diatribe)

Ammar 808
Super Stambeli (Shouka)

Atrocious Filth
OVV (Moans Music/Fabryka Hałasu)

Donna Candy
H4T (Bandcamp)

Drew Daniel & John Wiese
Through Mazes Running (Difficult Interactions)

Dunn With Rutmanis
Crackpot Whorehead (Rock Is Hell)

Fire! Orchestra
Echoes (Rune Grammofon)

Holodec
All Dogs Come From Wolves (Scorpio Red)

Katie Kim
Hour Of The Ox (I Actually Like Music)

King Vision Ultra
Shook World (Hosted By Algiers) (PTP)

Kan Mikami & Mamer
Great Emotion (Badhead)

Strotter inst
Hornochse/Gnadenhof (Ruin Tapes)

Wadada Leo Smith & Orange Wave Electric
Fire Illuminations (Kabell)

John Wall
v01 (ds-singularity) (Bandcamp)

Chunyang Yao
Post-Oblivion (Dusty Ballz)

Compiled from the playlists of *Wire* staff. To hear a stream of our Office Ambience, go to thewire.co.uk. We welcome charts from record shops, radio shows, DJs, venues, labels, musicians, readers, etc. Email a top 15 to charts@thewire.co.uk – the more unusual the better

Damien Maloney

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58 patten
58 The Reds, Pinks & Purples
58 Alasdair Roberts
55 William Roper/Cassia Streb/Tim Feeney
60 Bruce Russell
53 Scatter
60 Sightless Pit
60 Sleaford Mods
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63 Thomas Stone
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62 Alan Wilkinson/Steve Noble/John Edwards
63 Xiu Xiu
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62 Various *Utopia Or Oblivion*

64 The Columns

72 The Boomerang

72 Death
72 Felt
72 Harald Grosskopf
72 François Jeanneau
72 Siegfried Kessler/Gus Nemeth/Stu Martin
72 Maajun
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74 Phauss
74 Phew
75 Andrew Poppy
75 Unwound
73 Various *Blacklips Bar: Androgyns & Deviants – Industrial Romance For Bruised & Battered Angels 1992–1995*

76 Print Run

76 *A Is For Anarchist: An ABC Book For Activists* by billy woods & M Musgrove
76 *A Licence To Rock And Pop: An Inventory Of Attitude* by James Fry
76 *Going Out: Walking, Listening, Soundmaking* edited by Elena Biserna
77 *On Minimalism: Documenting A Musical Movement* edited by Kerry O'Brien & William Robin
77 *The Names Of Minimalism: Authorship, Art Music, And Historiography In Dispute* by Patrick Nickleson
78 *I Feel Everything You Say, I Feel Everything You Hear* edited by Jan Lankisch
78 *Improvision: Orphic Art In The Age Of Jazz* by Simon Shaw-Miller
79 *Sound American No 29: The Roscoe Mitchell Issue* edited by Nate Wooley
79 *Time Come: Selected Prose 1975–2021* by Linton Kwesi Johnson

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Soundcheck A–Z

New CDs, vinyl, downloads, streams

Astroturf Noise
Blazing/Freezing
577 CD/DL
Sometimes it takes an outsider to really shake things up. Or, in the case of Astroturf Noise, three outsiders. On this follow-up to their 2020 self-titled debut, mandolin player Sam Day Harnet, violinist Sana Nagano and double bassist Zachary Swanson continue to cast a disruptive light on traditional US roots music, affectionately infusing bluegrass and country with the unruly energy of free improvisation and weird electronics.

Opening track "Tennessee Blazes" is the perfect example, a high-spirited hoedown with added whiffs of klezmer and Arabic dance music that descends (or ascends, depending on your perspective) into an extended interlude of spiky scrabbling before dissolving into ethereal wafts and finally hitching back on to the jaunty head. "Dying Mechanical Banjo Pt 1" is more abstract, fidgeting and collapsing its way into a suspenseful tick-tock-ping like the most AMM-influenced part of a Pink Floyd live jam circa 1967.

There are some inspired guest appearances too. On "Medium Lonely Blues" Stash Wyslouch adds manic acoustic guitar, introducing wild intervallic leaps and jagged dissonance like Eugene Chadbourne tussling with the ghost of Django Reinhardt. Pianist Walter Thompson peppers the old-time country ramble of "Historic Western Ghost Town Engulfed In Fire" with unexpected eruptions and sudden percussive clusters. Best of all, Susan Alcorn appears on a couple of ballads, her pedal steel sounding gorgeously full and rich, oozing pure feeling while also somehow effortlessly evoking the daft undersea kitsch of a *SpongeBob SquarePants* soundtrack.

The album's title summons the spectre of climate change and the tangible unease these three onlookers feel for the American project as the country descends further into political strife. Yet there's also joy here, a sense of having fun fiddling while the world burns, creating exciting new forms on which to ride the wild wave of chaos.
Daniel Spicer

King Ayisoba
Work Hard
Glitterbeat CD/DL/LP
King Ayisoba hails from the North East Region of Ghana and is one of the country's chief musical proponents. His latest album *Work Hard* utilises local musical talent with a deft touch being shown by longtime collaborator Arnold de Boer aka Zea (also a member of Dutch post-punk band The Ex) on curating, editing, production and mastering duties.

A key aspect of Ayisoba's work is his strident social awareness, highlighting negative areas of everyday people's lives and offering ways to remedy them. The lolloping, vocally rich opener "Good Things God Knows" decries the greed of Africa's leaders (*"Corruption is the foundation of poverty!"*) while "Tribe", with its playful flute patterns and bassline of sinewy funk, urges Ghanaians to learn their own local language. The effervescent "Kokoko Enter", with its incessantly catchy falsetto refrain, reveals a serious side by calling for improved border controls to prevent dangerous criminals from freely entering the country.

The introductory bars of "Bossi Labome" behold a quiet marvel of syncopation with a dundun talking drum, a lurching two-note bass repetition and the scratching of a two-stringed lute called a kologo all building in layers, and when the kick drum enters it feels joyfully giddy and off-kilter. Ayisoba's call for gender equality is made all the more pressing by the song's insistent pulse while the crack of a whip emphasises the point further still.

A host of traditional Ghanaian instruments is utilised to full effect, including a wooden hunting horn called a do that dolefully mocks human chatter in "People Talk Too Much" and multiple dos reappear during closing track "Buri Malima", where their chorus resembles a steam train's forlorn whistle. The distinctive sounds of a single-stringed lute played with a bow called a goje and a small wooden flute (wii) also feature throughout the album.

Work Hard bristles with infectious energy, a joyful collision of King Ayisoba's positive conscious thinking and trademark vocal urgency steeped in ear-friendly melodies and a low end that at times touches on funk and reggae. Bolstered by de Boer's warm, immediate production, it's an album that leaps out of the speakers.
Shane Woolman

B Cool-Aid
Leather Blvd
Lex DL/LP
Pink Siifu is surely one of most compellingly wayward presences in US hiphop and R&B of the last few years. On *Leather Blvd* he comes together with producer Ahwlee and a welter of friends from across hiphop's cutting edge, the collaborative aspect making it Siifu's most instantaneously accessible and variegated release yet. There's a tangible sense in which the presence of friends and contemporaries enables him to finally stop being so damn impressive and start fluidly exploring the music he loves. No surprise then that *Leather Blvd* is the most relaxed and suggestive he's ever sounded.

That relaxed, semi-improvisational mixtape vibe sees the music here flow from hiphop to jazz, neo-soul to funk, keeping you on your toes but also appearing natural in its genre-blending. Even when the beats hit hard – as on the single "Cn't Go Back" – there's a gaseous trippiness to the loops and playing that's immensely redolent of Outkast at their subaquatic best, a sense of deliberate sonic dislocation from reductive notions of harsh reality on tracks like the gorgeous "Soundsgood", even if that harsh reality is hinted at lyrically.

Ahwlee's beats and loops are absolutely key in that feel of stoned diffuseness. Check the sublime disco-ish pulse of "If U Can See Me (4U)" and how the vocals from Siifu and Liv.e seem to fade into red-eyed dissipation. The variety of vocals paints a picture of *Leather Blvd* as a place where hustlers, lovers, preachers and vagrants can drop by, drop gems and vanish into the ether of sound that hangs over the whole album.
Neil Kulkarni

Gerald Cleaver/Brandon Lopez/Hprizm
In The Wilderness
577 CD/DL/LP
Hprizm and Gerald Cleaver have met before. In 2021, the Antipop Consortium beatmaker created a remix of the prolific jazz drummer's solo electronic album *Signs*. On *In the Wilderness*, Hprizm reworks a live performance at 577 Records' Forward Festival featuring Cleaver and bassist Brandon Lopez.

At the heart of this album is an improvisatory negotiation of time and space, dimensionally expanded by Hprizm's texturally melodic synthwork and studious sleight of hand. On album opener "Mainsource A" a loping beat finds its way into a slinking strut while oceanic waves cascade from a smouldering electronic cauldron, only to be sacrificed to the cut-up shuffle of "T Top" and the kinetic minimalism of "Hopoff".

The sublime submersion returns in the brackish murmur of "Rama", then the strained stutter of "Blowback". On "Hallucinate", a voice says *"OK, very rarely do I hallucinate"*, beginning an anecdote that is finished by the music's psychoacoustic subtleties. Here, the strings of Lopez's bass sound almost like a muted trumpet.

The first side of the album finishes with "GLP", slicing time into asymmetrical intervals. The B side opener "Mainsource C" is angular yet atmospheric, a noir boogie emanating from long, de Chirico-like shadows. The mysterious vibe deepens in the downtempo grooves of "GLP3". On "GLP1" the drums are folded into the fragrant ambience while a solo synth winks and glissandos. The binaural mix and sauntering drums of "Ono" reward headphone listening.

Many of these tracks are quite brief, making them feel a bit like studies. Thankfully, the music is given more room to breathe on the seven minute album closer "Mainsource C1". The bass strings creak eerily alongside rolling, cosmic toms. A close-miked tambourine

The artist formerly known as Tikiman returns with his first solo album in over a decade

By Steve Barker

Tiki situation: Paul St Hilaire

Paul St Hilaire
Tikiman Vol 1
Kynant EX DL/2xLP

Although the origins of dub techno are often credited to the many incarnations of Berlin duo Moritz von Oswald and Mark Ernestus – Basic Channel, Rhythm & Sound, Chain Reaction, Burial Mix, Round Three – they themselves would freely admit that their sound was directly sourced from two Jamaican recordings. Namely, The Wailers Band's "No Partial" – the dub version to their "Higher Field Marshall", produced by Clive Chin and featuring the melodica of Peter Tosh – and perhaps more significantly The Chosen Brothers' 1979 Wackies single "Mango Walk", produced by the great Clive 'Azul' Hunt and Lloyd 'Bullwackie' Barnes, and reworked by Rhythm & Sound as "Mango Drive" in 1998. But whereas reggaeton, another subgenre of reggae based solely on the riddim to the Steely & Clevie production for Shabba Ranks's "Dem Bow", continues to flow chiefly from Latin America and its many edges, dub techno has become a worldwide phenomenon – continually shapeshifting in its explorations of space and sound, while remaining a largely underground force.

Over a career now spanning more than 30 years, Paul St Hilaire, formerly known as Tikiman, has established himself as a legendary though vaporous figure, still an outlier due to both his reticence – virtually no interviews are on record and those which do exist are monosyllabic – and his singular vision being realised only via the medium of dub techno. He was born and raised in Dominica, an island with a mixed English/French colonial history, but moved to Berlin in 1994 where he cut his first tune as featured vocalist for Round Three (whose "Acting Crazy" on Basic Channel subsidiary Main Street was a light, skipping house track with only traces of what was to come). Following that, von Oswald and Ernestus launched the Burial Mix 10" series, which developed a much deeper sound: slow steppers with St Hilaire's vocals bending low, generating a set of singles including "Never Tell You", "What A Mistry" and "Music A Fe Rule" that helped to establish the subgenre.

The critical acclaim afforded these recordings made St Hilaire in demand as one of the few recognised vocalists in dub techno. He went on to record with Deadbeat, Larry Heard, Stereotyp, the Jahtari boys in Leipzig, The Bug and, perhaps most successfully, contributed to 2009's *The Seduction Of Silence* from Stephen Hitchell's Intrusion project, lending liquid flowing vocals and Rhodes keys to "Little Angel". The album is now recognised as a dub techno classic. Hilaire then founded his own False Tuned label within the Basic Channel family, self-producing two albums and a number of singles between 2001–06. During this period he was also involved in a legal dispute over using the name Tikiman and so reverted to his given name. St Hilaire's main collaborator since that time has been Marco Rhauderwiek, who produced a couple of albums and a few singles through to 2022.

In 2010 I was lucky enough to attend a rare dubwise gig at the White Rabbit club in Beijing, meeting up with Mark Ernestus and Tikiman. Ernestus played out a set of crunching dancehall dubs from his laptop with images of the Jamaican 7" labels captured on the mixing desk skin application; for his part, unlike most deejays, St Hilaire prowled and interjected studiously rather than repeating old MC tropes and mad chat, his lyrics contrasting with the deluge of nonstop beats. At that stage I thought of St Hilaire as a deejay only. Few were aware of the extent of his compositional and technical mastery, developed in his home studio in the Kreuzberg area of Berlin. Here he kept an extensive collection of vintage hardware, self-built instruments and notebooks scribbled with endless lyrics, plus a vast archive of material spanning ambient dub, avant jazz, lush techno and lovers rock.

Tikiman Vol 1 is perhaps the first time St Hilaire has chosen to showcase the full range of his skills. The set is intoxicatingly rich and, with a couple of exceptions, largely downbeat, a vari-tempo melange of patois metaphors on education, displacement and personal history best exemplified by the opening "Bedroom In My Bag" (*"Mister, mister/Where are you going?/I'm heading for a faraway land/What are you having in the bag in your hand?/Help us to understand/He said, I've got my bedroom in my bag"*). Lyrically the album reflects on present life in Berlin and a Dominican past, specifically focusing on St Hilaire's hometown of Grand Bay, where he worked with musicians famous for the island's different strains of carnival music. Sonically there's much more variation – if not in the pace of the riddims, then certainly the instrumentation and textures – making it St Hilaire's most approachable album for non-dub techno aficionados. Check "Keep Safe", a cautionary tale for the time. It starts with bright electric keys over analogue chording, but shock arrives with guitar that could be a joyous Sonny Sharrock. There's also the accomplished instrumental closer "Three And A Half", with its softly falling synth waves and indistinct vocals evoking arrival on empty shores.

Fittingly mastered by another hero of the dub techno genre, Stefan Betke, the album sees St Hilaire taking his rightful place as a modern master whose importance and influence can now – though long overdue – be fully recognised. ○

Joanna St Hilaire

clinks in the foreground while vapours of dungeonesque reverb define the boundaries of a space that both is and isn't the performance venue. When the audience claps, it becomes clear just how far out we've drifted.
Emily Pothast

Attila Csihar
Void Ov Voices: Baalbek
Ideologic Organ DL/LP
Hungarian vocalist Attila Csihar has always been fascinated by megaliths. "For me it's so inspiring because when I'm standing there these things just talk to me," he told Edwin Pouncey in *The Wire* 382 in 2015. Csihar recalled the trip to the ancient site in Baalbek in Lebanon, which includes one of the largest Roman temple ruins. Although his solo project Void Ov Voices was never meant to materialise on an album, he returned to Baalbek to make outdoor recordings for the potential release. "My first idea was just to play live, just see how far I could go playing live," he said. "So instead of going into a studio I went and recorded on top of this ruin in Baalbek. I wanted to feel this energy."

The album arrives eight years later. It would be inappropriate to call it a solo debut for someone who has amassed such a mammoth body of work. Csihar entered the realms of heavy music in the mid-1980s as the voice of the metal band Tormentor. He would later front Mayhem and become a semi-regular member of Sunn O))). As Void Ov Voices, he delves into ancient music to explore the ritualistic aspects of heaviosity. For Csihar, as with Phurpa, drone music is a technology to channel deep time and the vibration of universal matter.

Baalbek consists of two longform pieces with diaristic qualities. Csihar works with looped vocals and processed field recordings. At first listen, you can feel distanced from this intimate process, tied as it is to a specific place with all of its mysteries, energy and archaeoacoustic workings. But with each spin, the album drags the listener into its secret chambers, as in the second part of "Daytime Of 30th Of March, On The Top Of The Biggest Ever Human-Made Monolith Called Stone Of The South".

Csihar uses at least three vocal layers, with disembodied sulphurous hissings forming the rhythmic structure. Liturgical chants enter from a distance, slowly mounting the tension.

It's fortunate that Csihar reversed his decision not to commit Void Ov Voices to vinyl. *Baalbek* captures the essence, commitment and grandeur of his art.
Miloš Hroch

Drew Daniel & John Wiese
Through Mazes Running
Difficult Interactions DL/LP
Through Mazes Running is the second album by Drew Daniel of Matmos and The Soft Pink Truth with John Wiese of Sissy Spacek as well as myriad other noise spectrum projects. Despite a longstanding association they don't seem to have collaborated formally enough to warrant a co-credit until 2018's *Continuous Hole* which, though abrasive and turbid, made more concessions to regular tempos than this follow-up. That album fell into a lockstep of parched, denatured techno and electroconvulsive dub often enough to conjure an impression of Pan Sonic and Basic Channel squabbling impatiently yet in time over an extremely choppy phone line.

For the most part, *Through Mazes Running* is a far more calligraphic and restless exercise. Percussive but arrhythmic, it's a tape and electronics duo exchange between performers as determined not to stabilise as they are to synchronise, reflecting an apparent mania never to repeat the same gesture, describe the same form or take the same turn in the maze twice. The artwork is a palimpsest of what looks like blind contour drawings, recognisable as hands, feet and digits, which is mostly apt except that little on the album stays still long enough to articulate such legible forms.There's a faintly avian restiveness that sounds like it could be compared to a cranked up, zero-chill version of *Worship The Glitch* era Coil. Some samples of voice appear but they're atomised beyond recognition, and leave the briefest possible afterimpressions swiftly compacted by further oncoming sonic scree.

From "Despised Clang" onward, the album grows marginally more sedate, twitching and faltering its way into a halflight of near illbience by the time album closer "Clinging Threshold" fades out.
James Gormley

Deerhoof
Miracle-Level
Joyful Noise CD/DL/LP/MC
Deerhoof's 19th album is their first to be completely written and sung in Japanese, a decision that lead singer and bassist Satori Matsuzaki claimed was preferable to singing in the language of "the world's policeman". The album also marks the first time the group have recorded from start to finish in a professional recording studio with a producer (Mike Bridavsky). It would therefore be technically correct to say that *Miracle-Level* is the band's studio debut.

Listening to the album is like upgrading to ultra-HD TV after years of watching your favourite show in low definition. Or walking out into the world you thought you knew with a fresh specs prescription: the impossibly clean details, a clarity that feels almost naked. It's a quality that suits Deerhoof's oddball virtuosity. It also suits this particular set of songs, for whatever accessibility that might be lost in the decision to eschew English lyrics is balanced by a fresh emotional immediacy. Arrangements are sparse and pristine, each sound serving a purpose.

Standout moments include the rapid staccato barrage of "Sit Down, Let Me Tell You A Story" and the tangy grind of "Everybody, Marvel". "My Lovely Cat!" is joyously wonky, dedicated to the late internet famous feline Lil Bub, previously owned by producer Bridavsky: *"God please make my wish come true... Gradually get slower/Make longevity longer/Make you my immortal friend"*. The album reaches its giddy climax with the walloping "Phase-Out All Remaining Non-Miracles By 2028" and the proggy goodness of "Momentary Art Of Soul!", whose circular, phasing, polyrhythmic riffs are apt to twist the listener's head off.

The album closes with "Wedding, March, Flower" which has drummer Greg Saunier and Matsuzaki swapping roles for a tender piano-led ballad. A fitting conclusion to an album that witnesses Deerhoof at their most vulnerable and volatile.
Leah Kardos

Dry Thrust
The Less You Sleep
Trost CD/DL
Dry Thrust comprise three Austria based improvisors who have each explored possibilities outside of the free jazz ghetto. Drummer Dieter Kern has pursued high energy acoustic improvisation in DEK Trio with pianist Elisabeth Harnik and saxophonist Ken Vandermark, and has also hurled up some nasty noise rock with Bulbul. German guitarist Martin Siewert has played with drummer Tony Buck and trumpeter Axel Dörner among others but has, equally, scuffed about in the electronically augmented trio Radian. Keyboard player Georg Graewe was among the second generation of German improvisors who, in the 1970s, operated in the space opened up by Peter Brötzmann et al, and has since made serous efforts to fuse avant garde jazz and contemporary classical.

With Dry Thrust, Graewe switches from his customary piano to organ (either a Hammond or a decent facsimile of one), summoning an impressive palette of sound effects. Add in Siewert's electric guitar and electronics, and it's often hard to tell who's doing what. Where's that Geiger counter growl coming from? Those Morse code blips? That machine gun crackle? Though most tracks are less than five minutes long, they bristle with a dense accumulation of small, swift gestures.

Not everything is an exercise in restrained abstraction, though. A few tracks towards the album's end positively scorch. On "Afterburner", Kern's pounding thump generates great sweltering organ swells with a psychedelic intensity not unlike Larry Young's Love Cry Want trio. "Wet Engine" starts off as bullish alt fusion with Kern smacking out a staccato tattoo, Siewert shredding madly and Graewe flashing out fluid runs like a supercharged Thijs van Leer, before the whole thing melts into a filthy puddle of orgiastic thrashing. Finally, "Casimir Dynamics" sets off at a hectic gallop with guitar and organ trading swift licks while Kern maintains a boiling free barrage.
Daniel Spicer

Marc Ducret
Palm Sweat: Marc Ducret Plays The Music Of Tim Berne
Out Of Your Head CD/DL/LP
Guitarist Marc Ducret has been playing Tim Berne's music for more than three decades. The two first collaborated in Caos Totale, then in Bloodcount, Big Satan, Science Friction and various one-off situations. He has also made a slew of albums under his own name, and collaborated with many other artists in all sorts of configurations. His style is perfectly suited to Berne's music: it's jagged and sharp, capable

of negotiating the saxophonist's long, winding melodies but also chopping the music into pieces with dramatic pauses between phrases.

Palm Sweat is a carefully constructed and brilliantly mixed album. Ducret overdubs multiple lines of guitar, some acoustic and miked very close, others distorted and frying the air. On various tracks, Fabrice Martinez plays trumpet, piccolo trumpet, flugelhorn and tuba; Christiane Bopp plays trombone; Sylvaine Hélary plays alto flute. Ducret's son Bruno is heard on cello here and there. There are solo acoustic pieces, noise rock jams, and some lovely father-son duo playing. There's no attempt to create the illusion that this is live music. It's a collage of fragments.

One of the most fascinating tracks, "Stutter Step", begins with a low, patient rumble like a bulldozer idling; over that, Ducret lets loose long, stinging single notes and chords like bursts of telephone static. His guitar is doubled and tripled, so it's like he's hurling imprecations at himself. It's not unlike some of the noise exercises on Pat Metheny's *Zero Tolerance For Silence*, but sparser, almost industrial.

Then, just past the halfway mark, the piece undergoes a complete transformation. Fingerpicked acoustic guitar and bass appear, spliced in as if with staples and tape. And then the horns begin moaning softly like a choir at a funeral mass. Now it sounds like something from Hal Willner's foggy, ominous Charles Mingus tribute *Weird Nightmare*.

Phil Freeman

Debby Friday
Good Luck
Sub Pop CD/DL/LP

It takes serious guts for an artist to leave behind their trademark style and start exploring expressions on the opposite side of the spectrum. Take Debby Friday for example. Since the 2019 release of *Death Drive* and *Bitchpunk* on Deathbomb Arc, the Nigerian born, Toronto based musician and multimedia artist became synonymous with a seething take on industrial dance music under the motto "unbridled feminine aggression". But her debut on Sub Pop trades her signature club blitz for a far more nuanced approach.

Good Luck doesn't betray Friday's general aesthetic or artistic persona. On the contrary, it retains her darkly seductive, slightly edgy and risqué aura, but conveys it through a disparate medley of styles. In fact, the opening "Good Luck" sounds like an alternate take from *Bitchpunk*. *"Wake up, don't you fuck it up"*, she proclaims with an authority like Miss Red, while lush beats pulse around her with understated intensity. The following "So Hard To Tell" lowers shields and slips into a gorgeous stream of R&B, ultimately becoming a confident confession.

"I Got It" returns to the dancefloor, but also retains the previous track's fragility and softness, while the suave, Depeche Mode-ish synthpop of "Hot Love" makes Friday sing in a lower, silkier register. Later, the central triptych of "Heartbreakerrr", "What A Man" and "Safe" rises from provocative pop and goth-tinged rock, complete with roaring guitar, into nocturnal, tactfully surreal electronic affectations, while a layer of pitch-shifting distortion wraps around her voice.

The hard-hitting beats and assertive vocals of "Pluto Baby" might have served as the perfect closer, but the album instead ends with "Wake Up", an abstract short that raises more questions than it answers, leaving us with a cheeky cliffhanger from an exciting artist.

Antonio Poscic

Satoko Fujii & Otomo Yoshihide
Perpetual Motion
Ayler CD/DL

Satoko Fujii and Otomo Yoshihide have their commonalities. Both born in the 1950s, they

Time Trout and Scatter serve up striking examples of virtuosic vocal-led improv

By Louise Gray

Time Trout
Stuck Like Jane Austen
Otoroku DL
Scatter
On A Clear Day Like This
577 CD/DL

Two albums from sterling ensembles, each fronted by a vocalist of stunning virtuosity. The splendidly named *Stuck Like Jane Austen* seems, at first, to have very little to do with the early 19th century novelist, although if Viv Corringham ever planned to sing *Sense And Sensibility* live, I'd be first in the queue. It may be that, as hinted by Corringham's incredible riffs on *"the back and forth of otium, of otium"* on *Stuck*'s blues-rhythmed title track, Time Trout's first album concerns those very Austenish themes of relationships, aloneness and negotiations. Even if it isn't, the collection of 14 live improvisions is a masterpiece in spontaneous strangeness.

Much of this has to do with Corringham's vocals, a compelling mix of extended techniques, singing and sprechstimme, focused on subjects such as okonomiyaki pancakes, spinning eggs and – why not? – frosted bats. Certainly, there's humour here, but it's borne of a vocalist doing tightrope tricks, streaming her material from links that are being created in the now. Alongside Corringham, Time Trout are a quartet made up of Marcus Cummins (saxophones, shruti box and various implements), bassist and *Wire* contributor Dave Mandl, and percussionist Stephen Moses. Each musician having had an extensive immersion in experimental and improv scenes, there's a steady texture of sound from all present, with Corringham's vocal binding everything together.

Time Trout's album is the product of incredible musical intelligence and the same applies to Scatter's *On A Clear Day Like This*. Recorded live in 2017 at London's Cafe Oto and released in Scatter's 31st year together as a unit, this is an improvised set of immense subtleties. It's an album of two tracks (the 35 minute title track being the main one) and from the first second, it's in full-on band mode, with Phil Minton's gymnastic vocals doing what they do best – describing architectural spaces and cavities of wonderous existence.

For all Minton's fireworks – sparks falling from vocal trajectories, little plosives exploding in the sonic firmament – there is the sense of intuitive communication with founder and keyboardist Pat Thomas, percussionist Roger Turner and guitarist Dave Tucker. Having sufficient time to work out ideas and modalities, the title track is a holding space in which each member of Scatter creates their own strategies for making the work.

It's a piece of mercurial mood changes, Minton's unparalleled vocals streaming from the edge of language while Turner's percussion ranges from drum kit assaults to the most gentle of cymbal strokes. Thomas's keyboard textures meanwhile are recorded with an airy formality that gives structure to the entire work. "Like This", the second of the two tracks, is a condensed wonder, Tucker and Thomas chasing Minton and Turner's hyperactivity for three and a half minutes. ○

Fishing for compliments: Time Trout

Michael Jung

have been consistently productive musicians who have defined unique presences within Japan's improvisational scene.

But there are also differences. Fujii is rooted in jazz, and in most of her music she is a leader or equal collaborator. Otomo is less committed to genre and more open to whatever; he has played both idiomatically appropriate and strategically disruptive guitar in jazz combos, spun chaotic noise from turntables within the tightly arranged jazz rock of Ground Zero, matched barely there electronics with Sachiko M and other onkyo musicians, improvised with young players who have developmental challenges and performed Bon Odori folk dance music. So, while it's not a huge surprise that they have finally played together, neither is it a shock that it took them until 2022 to do so.

Each musician opted for their primary instrument (piano and electric guitar respectively) for the initial encounter documented by *Perpetual Motion*, and neither brought any sheet music onto the stage. Their initial gestures are as exploratory as sonar pings, which they rather resemble — a single knock on the piano's lid, then a couple of bright guitar harmonics. Fujii's early decision to delay engaging the keyboard in favour of the piano's exterior and interior is astute. She might not be quite the stylistic omnivore that Otomo is, but by keeping things centred around sound rather than notes, she keeps the playing field open. This allows the music to evolve through the gradual accumulation of volume and density, peaking with percussive barrages and frantic, Sharrock-like flurries. Otomo's approach combines aggression and grace, sharing the responsibility for slowly cultivating and titrating tension.

Even when he's bashing the guitar like it's a drum, Otomo is matching Fujii's gestures, not undermining them. It's unclear whether either musician is looking for a rematch, but there's room for the music to grow if they do.

Bill Meyer

Katie Gately
Fawn/Brute
Houndstooth CD/DL/LP

US composer/producer/vocalist Gately's previous record – 2020's moving *Loom* – demonstrated that she was capable of crafting beguiling otherworldly music from very worldly sources and experience. Created and composed after her mother's death, the album delved deep into themes of loss, grief and goodbyes. But *Fawn/Brute* explores birth and adolescence as seen through the prism of the arrival of Gately's first daughter – the dualism of the title reflecting the move from childhood to teenage angst, the continuity of that life reflected in the heartbeat pace established from the off, as well as in the short, sharp, one-word song titles.

The sound palette here is imbued with more contrast and light than that of its predecessor, openers "Seed" and "Howl" summate the steady dawning of life's sensory flow after the trauma of emerging from amniotic bliss. The instrumentation here is key to that sensory overload – this music has low end, high end and rhythm, but what's providing those elements is constantly up for grabs, from piercing horns to multitracked vocal incantations to rippling synths. "Fawn" and "Cleave" are as catchy as prime hyperpop, even if their hooks emerge in between gurning passages of surreal grinding digi-noise, while "Peeve" recalls the icy focus and starkness of Jenny Wilson.

"Scale" kicks in the teenage half of the record with Arabic psych licks, and the album takes a turn into compelling post-punk digital blues on tracks like "Brute" and "Tame" – beats as measured as footsteps, Gately multitracking her multiple personae into poppy vistas of melody and drama. Like birth and life however, this album emerges as too tangled to be pulled into a simplistic linear narrative; throughout, innocence and trauma co-mingle both lyrically and sonically. *Fawn/Brute* is as complex and irresistible as its themes would suggest.

Neil Kulkarni

Tim Hecker
Infinity Pool (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)
Milan DL
No Highs
Kranky CD/DL/2xLP

Tim Hecker's soundtrack to Brandon Cronenberg's hallucinatory horror film *Infinity Pool* sees the Canadian composer and producer confidently flexing high-grade atmospheric dread. In Cronenberg's film, rich people engage in increasingly depraved activities on an isolated island resort. Hecker's disquieting atmospheres blend sci-fi dystopia, twisted acoustic textures, crushed vocal tones and heavy doses of volatile noise. There is also a subtle tenderness, an almost romantic nihilism, that tensions and contextualises *Infinity Pool*, allowing it to work as a listening experience separate to the film.

The nasty vibes really get going with thrilling surges in "Hit And Run" and heightened grinding discord in "The Arrest". The mechanically slow groove of "Doubling Part 1", with its wonderfully queasy string drones, calls to mind the slinky revulsion of Mica Levi's music for Jonathan Glazer's 2013 film *Under The Skin*. On the clattering "Home Invasion" it sounds like Hecker is throwing everything he has in his kitchen at the score. The soundtrack reaches a peak with the throbbing horror show of "Orgy", the degraded crush of "Humiliation" and the unrelenting panic of "Killing The Dog".

Coming out around the same time is Hecker's first studio album in almost four years. The music on *No Highs* sounds like the image on the front cover feels – an inverted cityscape obscured by fog, greyscale, gigantic, austere. "Monotony" begins with a 7/8 rhythm bleeping like frantic morse code, while gated drones mumble below and string lines intersect and tangle above. "Total Garbage" drags itself along with fatigued sounding instruments (saxophone courtesy of Colin Stetson) before slipping off into a muted dream. On "Lotus Light" a tethered energy of a rising beat ends up burrowing a hole and retreating into itself. A similar surrendering is felt on "Anxiety" – over eight minutes a gently hammering rhythm is unmoved as instrumental tones shift, squirm, escalate, bleed and blur around it.

No Highs is a soundtrack for knotted stomachs – introverted, devoid of catharsis and all the more moving for its honesty and restraint.

Leah Kardos

James Holden
Imagine This Is A High Dimensional Space Of All Possibilities
Border Community CD/DL/2xLP

The title of James Holden's new album echoes the optimism and cosmic idealism of ambient techno circa Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia's *Ov Biospheres And Sacred Grooves* and The Orb's *Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld*. But it also captures something of the formal excitement of European electronic music at the dawn of the 1990s, when samplers and effects were distributing the vibrations of house and techno vertically, horizontally and every which way your brain could imagine. His fourth solo album (in over two decades of activity) sets off on an epic odyssey spanning techno, Indian raga music and 70s electronic and art rock, and while it sometimes struggles under the weight of its ambition, it also has a near miraculous way of somehow staying aloft.

The range of sounds and instruments the album strives to bring together – ranging from tabla and violin to modular synth and field recordings – makes it an experimental project by default. On "You Are In A Clearing", the shifting krautrock rhythms – played on live drum kit – conjure a feeling that's beyond the sterile sound design of most dance albums. "Contains Multitudes" feels more formulaic and programmed to start with – but by the end the track has devolved into a Spanish-tinged piano and tabla vamp that's like McCoy Tyner on *Olé Coltrane*.

The way these surprises are smuggled in via skilful sonic illusions attests to Holden's wide listening habits, and his judgement for bringing different sounds together like an old school studio producer. "Trust Your Feet" sounds like synths going through the motions of rippling arpeggios, until the fluttering tones reveal themselves as flutes or recorders, and the controlled chaos evokes the experimentation of early Kraftwerk from before the machines took over.

Imagine This taps into strange sources of energy that many dance music producers find hard to access. There's the benign curiosity of Cluster on the elliptical patterns of "The Missing Key"; the constrained and uptight funk of Talking Heads with the bass stabs of "Worlds Collide Mountains Form". While many dance albums feel burdened and over-thought, *Imagine This* effortlessly allows a global spectrum of patterns and vibrations to co-exist within the same widescreen space.

Derek Walmsley

Jan Jelinek
Seascape – Polyptych
Faitiche DL/LP

In 2022, German musician Jan Jelinek and Canadian media artist Clive Holden created *Seascape – Polyptych*, a piece of generative art based around John Huston's 1956 film

adaptation of Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick*. Software uses samples selected by the pair to generate a reactive montage where sound and vision each influence the other.

Holden's visuals register like washed out, sun-bleached snippets of the original film as short sections judder and repeat, retaining the essence of Huston's source material but sharpening it into low level hypnotic dread. Like the imagery, Jelinek's sounds fluctuate through creaking glitch prompted by the maniacal dialogue of Gregory Peck's Ahab, but distilling it into a more creepy and abstract blur. Severed from Holden's images and presented here as a full-length album, the sonic effect remains potent.

The opening piece "The Water Seems Changed To Mist And Vapour" is an elongated swathe of slurred climatic rumble floating among flotsam hubbub, like a time-stretched shipwreck. It recalls the final moments of Chris Hughes's "Slow Motion Blackbird", but where his piece unravels a hidden beauty, Jelinek finds a deeper, churning dread. Elsewhere, "It Moves Swiftly Forward, Throwing Up Great Waves" elongates that angst into something approaching horror, its rolling drone and intermittent chatter pulled apart like a jump-scare in constant torpid loop.

On "Waiting And Watching (Version)" the dialogue repeats *"One, one, one"*, bobbing among a spray of orchestral fragments to form a mantra rising out of the swell. However, this is one of the few moments on *Seascape – Polyptych* where specific words are intelligible in the mixture and, like Holden's visuals, Jelinek strips back the surface tension to directly engage with the darkness at the heart of Huston's film. Finally, the album closes with "On Their Quay", a sinking choral motif which swallows the unease of previous pieces, like Ahab dragged down into the depths by the whale.

Spenser Tomson

King Vision Ultra
Shook World (Hosted By Algiers)
PTP DL/MC

Mixtape culture and sampling are a cornerstone for New York artist Geng and his label PTP. More than just an ethos, they serve as practical methods through which sprawling musical and philosophical ideas take shape. While Geng's previous outings as King Vision Ultra carried immense gravitas, none can compare to the sheer scope of *Shook World*, a work that pays respect to mixtapes by pushing the format to extremes and which recycles stems from *Shook*, the new album by Atlanta post-punk gospel outfit Algiers.

Pressing play on *Shook World* is like stepping into a psychogeography of New York stretched between the past, present and future. There is something decidedly concrète in Geng's world building. Field recordings and sound bites capture subtle but distinctive urban ambience, then intertwine

New York label Infrequent Seams initiates a subscription series in search of singularity

By Daniel Spicer

James Ilgenfritz/Sandy Ewen/Michael Foster
Ekphrastic Discourse
Infrequent Seams DL/MC
Time Phase Trio
Time Phase Trio
Infrequent Seams DL/MC
William Roper/Cassia Streb/Tim Feeney
Avenue 64
Infrequent Seams DL/MC
Lily Guarneros Maase
blood::face
Infrequent Seams DL/MC

The New York label Infrequent Seams seeks to document the emergence of a single "post-millennial genre" that locates its origins in the 20th century avant garde traditions of the AACM, MEV, Sonic Arts Union, no wave, the New York School and free jazz. That's already meant releasing work by established musicians such as Andrew Cyrille, Andrea Parkins and Elliott Sharp. But these first four releases in the new K7 Commissioning Series – for which the label is adopting a subscription model, offering one download release plus limited tape run per month – presents artists still in their ascendance.

Collective instrumental free improvisation is the context for two of them, both by trios. Double bassist (and label runner) James Ilgenfritz, electric guitarist Sandy Ewen and saxophonist Michael Foster offer a suite of somewhat arid improvisations with echoes of Evan Parker/Derek Bailey/Han Bennink's *Topography Of The Lungs*, albeit with that date's ferocity largely excised. At one extreme, drily percussive reed-slaps and frictive scrapes sketch a sparse, fidgety pointillism. At the other, windy susurrations, glowering amp hum and parched arco drones exude a not entirely welcoming aural environment. The whole session seems to suggest a doomed industriousness in some Sisyphean purgatory.

Time Phase Trio, in contrast, stake out a territory that's infused with a certain wry humour – even a little slapstick levity – not least because it includes the fruity parps and squelches of Jen Baker's loquacious trombone. Percussionist Shayna Dunkelman provides gently accented and thoughtfully positioned tom beats and cymbal splashes, while guitarist Ty Citerman adds taut plunks and pings. Several tracks are "choice based" improvisations arranged by Citerman, which allow the performers to manipulate single bar cells as they see fit within the overarching confines of the piece. A debt to Anthony Braxton's playfully serious processes seems likely.

Two releases from Los Angeles based artists reveal the label's intent to document more than just jazz-adjacent free improv. Cassia Streb, Tim Feeney and William Roper improvise together on three tracks that explore each artist's compositional systems. Streb's utilises graphically transcribed field recordings of LA's Highland Park region interpreted through scratched drum skins, hushed harmonics and plaintive bleats. Feeney's layers fragile snippets of sound produced by a rubbed wine glass, jingling bells and a lonesome viola. Roper's centres on a poetic recitation with added string drones, metallic scrapes and a tootling tuba. The whole session is pregnant with mystery.

Meximerican guitarist Lily Guarneros Maase's offering is both the most conventional and the most surprising. "Blood" is haunting psychedelic folk rock for full acoustic band, like Linda Perhacs fronting The Skygreen Leopards, with a scalp-tingling slide guitar solo by Insun Blemel. Elsewhere, Maase displays her considerable chops with solo improvisations: "Kodafilm 3" and "Kodafilm 6" suggest a backwoods exoticism like Davey Graham in trapper's furs, while "Improvisation Two" follows a more jaggedly atonal aesthetic. It's a deeply imaginative date that brilliantly sidesteps tired notions of the American Primitive. ○

Fingerpicking good: Lily Guarneros Maase

John Kiefer

with fragments of textural noise, boom bap samples, spoken word raps and affecting saxophone licks. The music not only sounds, but feels like New York – a document of its streets, grit and chaos as they once were and as they are today, beyond the gentrified and sanitised projections of elites. It contains a vivid, living impression of the city retold through Geng's signature compositional perspective and contributions of his PTP family, from the poetry of DJ Haram and LaTasha N Nevada Diggs to the piercing noise of Dreamcrusher and Dis Fig. Stretching across 21 cuts, the album's full purpose is only realised when experienced as an uninterrupted sonic narrative.

For some the main attraction will be KVU's use of the Algiers stems, a collaboration which materialises in feeling rather than sound. Geng distorts and reframes the samples until they become his, but retains their original spirit, aimed against oppression and welcoming otherness. Like *Shook*, the release of *Shook World* marks the beginning, not the end of a dialogue, as the music becomes part of a verbal, communal history-making.

Antonio Poscic

Ingrid Laubrock
The Last Quiet Place
Pyroclastic CD/DL

"Grammy Season", the second track on Ingrid Laubrock's brilliant new album, pokes fun at the academy's outdated categories, celebrating an open genre world. Exploiting her sextet's potential to contain smaller ensembles within itself, Laubrock plays jazz, avant rock and chamber music elements off each other to create an ever-shifting but integrated whole.

As ingenious as this layering of idioms is, it's the ensemble's ability to move between textures and deconstruct the written composition that's particularly striking. The leader's saxophone dances around Michael Formanek's cantering bass and Tom Rainey's roiling toms, answered by the muffled growl of Brandon Seabrook's electric guitar. The middle section is built around a jaunty motif suggestive of a Dixieland Prime Time, with Mazz Swift's violin and Tomeka Reid's cello moving in and out of unison with Laubrock and Seabrook. For the coda, the ensemble morphs into a string quartet, a chiming guitar dissolving into stately arco chords.

Three pieces on the album are based on the same tone row, giving the music a beautifully unresolved character whatever the setting. The opening "Anticipation" begins with Swift and Reid draping gorgeous Appalachian string melodies around Seabrook's questioning chords. The theme comes back around several times, recast by different ensemble textures. The title track is informed by Elizabeth Kolbert's ecological writings, proposing that in the Anthropocene, the last quiet place is within oneself. Seabrook's strummed guitar recalls the bossa nova drift of Jim O'Rourke's pop albums, yet the high violin and soprano saxophone lines draw out the underlying sense of unease.

"Delusions" finds a spikier setting for the tone row, as the cello and bass perform a disjointed pincer movement around a guitar jabbing figure while Laubrock inhales reverse tape tones through her saxophone.

Stewart Smith

James Brandon Lewis
Eye Of I
Anti- CD/DL/LP

Tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis's latest album begins with the 45 second fragment "Foreground" on which he lays wailing sax over a soupy dub bassline as drums and subtle electronics crackle and thump. Except the bass isn't a bass, it's Christopher Hoffman's cello, pushed through distortion and other pedal-driven effects throughout the next 40 minutes of music (he doesn't play on the final track; there, Lewis is joined by The Messthetics, an instrumental trio consisting of guitarist Anthony Pirog and the former Fugazi rhythm section of bassist Joe Lally and drummer Brendan Canty).

On the second track, a version of Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free", the primary trio – Lewis, Hoffman and drummer Max Jaffe – are joined by cornet player Kirk Knuffke, and they turn what was a lovely early 1970s soul ballad into something that sounds like Albert Ayler's 1966 band taking marching band and gospel themes to Europe, or Sonny Rollins's 1962 quartet with Don Cherry, pulling tunes apart and stretching them like taffy.

For most of the album, the core group explore Lewis's own compositions, with the leader and Hoffman engaging in thoughtful conversation as Jaffe conveys pulse rather than time. Though he plays with great passion and force at times, the saxophonist isn't a screamer; even on the most aggressive tracks, like the 47 second "Middle Ground", he seems to be thinking carefully as he progresses, in the manner of Joe Henderson but with a mantra-like insistence on the melody that recalls David S Ware. Hoffman's cello is sometimes plucked, but more frequently transformed into a roaring, doomy drone.

In the album's second half, the trio borrow a Cecil Taylor melody ("Womb Water" from 1984's *Winged Serpent (Sliding Quadrants)*) that was a hectic outburst for large ensemble, and delivers a patiently unfurling rubato meditation.

Phil Freeman

Liturgy
93696
Thrill Jockey 2xCD/DL/2xLP
As The Blood Of God Bursts The Veins Of Time
Thrill Jockey DL

Liturgy may never escape the charge – fair, unfair or immaterial – of being black metal's pre-eminent gentrifiers. It is fair to say that they didn't start the process, which was underway before their formation, but a certain tone was set when mainstay Ravenna Hunt-Hendrix published the essay pamphlet *Transcendental Black Metal: A Vision Of Apocalyptic Humanism*, which effectively called for the genre to be remade in her band's image, in spite of scant prior involvement.

That was in 2009, the year of Liturgy's first full-length release. *93696* is their sixth to date and, in many ways, it still sounds like music made to illustrate a theory. The album follows a mini-album released last October titled *As The Blood Of God Bursts The Veins Of Time*, which is in an unappealing midtempo metalcore mode, but notable as a testing ground for aspects of the more sweeping, heterogeneous *93696*.

The bells and whistles to be reckoned with here are proverbial and literal. *93696* amply demonstrates the rolling crescendos and burst beats (distinct from blastbeats) central to Hunt-Hendrix's proposed transcendental black metal, which sets itself apart from the Hyperborean variety aka the Scandinavian second wave. The transcendental prefix may suggest something sonically and intellectually dynamic, but I recall the Hyperboreans running a comparable aesthetic into the ground somewhat with a trebly, maximalist, ecstatic, synth-saturated style that was ubiquitous in the late 1990s, prior to a brutalist backlash.

A trio of organ and woodwind-led pieces midway through *93696* ("Angel Of Hierarchy", "Red Crown II" and "Angel Of Emancipation") signal the arresting possibility that what Liturgy could transcend is metal itself. All they'd lose is a fairly teleological relationship with genre that allows little room for slippage, gaucheness or levity, and precludes something foundational about black metal's DNA. Never underestimate the importance of earnest Hyperboreans failing to realise that Venom – both Geordie pub metal chancers and subgenre originators – were, at least partly, a joke.

James Gormley

Liv.e
Girl In The Half Pearl
Real Life CD/DL/LP/MC

Girl In The Half Pearl is the second album from Liv.e, who is part of a wave of R&B artists dedicated to deconstructing soul, jazz and hiphop idioms. Her 2020 album *Couldn't Wait To Tell You* earned plenty of praise, but *Half Pearl* is clearly a stronger effort, and not just because she sounds more committed to songcraft and melody than on her wildly experimental post-genre debut.

It opens with "Gardetto" and a fusillade of glitch-y beats – it's the type of track that immediately grabs the attention. Liv.e dips into drum 'n' bass on "Ghost" as her voice dissolves into anguished screams, and she sways with jazzy cadences on "Wild Animals" as she playfully sings, *"The man always gotta have a bitch on a leash... most of these dogs don't deserve a meal"*. Like her otherwise innovative *Couldn't Wait To Tell You*, the 41 minute album has its inevitable longueurs (the abstract "Snowing!"). Otherwise it moves along with purpose and confidence. She's assisted by a handful of guest producers and musicians like Mndsgn, whose excellent 2021 album *Rare Pleasure* deserves a wider audience, and John Carroll Kirby.

Much of *Girl In The Half Pearl* centres around queer desire. *"Now her panties movin' down her ass/And I sneak over and I bite it"*, Liv.e murmurs appreciatively on the starkly erotic "A Slumber Party!?". But even when she's musing conspiratorially about blue and red

pills on the *Matrix*-inspired "No NewNews!!!" or trying to win over a former lover on album highlight "Heart Break Escape" the Texas raised, Los Angeles based artist fully embodies her songs. Her savvy use of edits and vocal effects may create a sense of whimsy, but they don't feel like a distraction. She retains a sense of purpose as she modulates between audible joy and lyrical reflection.

Mosi Reeves

Rob Mazurek & Exploding Star Orchestra
Lightning Dreamers
International Anthem CD/DL/LP

Horn player, electronic musician, composer, improvisor, light manipulator, painter, sculptor – Rob Mazurek is a polymath. But when you isolate his various musical endeavours, they tend to stabilise around certain modes of sound production or the presence of particular collaborators. If Chad Taylor isn't there, it can't be The Chicago Underground (although his presence doesn't guarantee that it will be); if Mazurek configures a quartet to include a pianist, it's going to extend the post-bop sound continuum.

The Exploding Star Orchestra aren't completely free of such restrictions; it's hard to imagine the name sticking to any gathering that doesn't feature Damon Locks's bold futurist proclamations. But it has become so flexible in sound, personnel and production methodologies that a multitude of inputs and an orientation towards cosmic transcendence have become its defining qualities.

Lightning Dreamers indicates that Mazurek's concept of what constitutes an orchestra is not bound by time or common location. It was mostly recorded by a six-piece ensemble (Mazurek, Locks, guitarist Jeff Parker, drummer Gerald Cleaver, keyboardists Craig Taborn and Angelica Sanchez) that had convened to perform at the Trans-Pecos Festival in September 2021. But Nicole Mitchell and Mauricio Takara, among others, contributed remotely, and two of the album's pieces combine studio work with live recordings of an edition of The Orchestra that featured the late Jaimie Branch and played in Paris the following year.

Nor is it confined by style. Parker's post-production moulds "Future Shaman" into a beat-forward funk workout reminiscent of his and Mazurek's late 1990s work with Isotope 217. The way the guitarist's leads cut through swirling percussion and electric pianos makes "White River" sound like a mash-up of Parker's New Breed and very early Weather Report. Layers of keyboards, brass and live recordings from Paris slide over and under each other like fog over water on the deeply ambient "Dream Sleeper". "Black River", on the other hand, churns similar elements into a volcanic maelstrom interspersed with sonic explosions.

Through it all, Locks's voice beams in like an intermittent signal from the edge of reception, exhorting listeners to direct their gaze into the beyond. *Lightning Dreamers* may be over the top and all over the place, but that's what it takes to project a complete picture of Mazurek's vision.

Bill Meyer

Moss Freed/Union Division
Micromotives
Discus 2xCD/DL

For improvisors who pursue radical spontaneity, large ensembles are a problem. Butch Morris originated the concept of using hand signals to extend spontaneity to large ensembles – though his vision turned out to be surprisingly authoritarian (he was a fan of some dictatorial classical conductors). Moss Freed's concept reacts against conduction, and is influenced more by Anthony Braxton's Ghost Trance Music. It's a dynamic vision of real-time creation that yields autonomy to the individual musician.

On *Micromotives*, Freed explains, there are seven distinct and contrasting compositions, recognisably similar in each performance. As he comments, unlike conduction, it "maintains the (ostensible) egalitarianism of free improv". The work is realised across two CDs by Union Division, which Freed created in 2018 in collaboration with leading figures from UK improv. The performances were recorded in 2018 and 2021, with ensembles of ten and 13 members respectively, including Freed (electric guitar), Laura Jurd (trumpet), Rachel Musson and George Crowley (tenor saxophone), and Elliot Galvin and Steve Beresford (piano).

Unlike Morris's conduction, Freed's leaders are temporary, and their signals can be ignored. Improvisation is always the default. The complex written sections are tackled by the band's excellent readers, but Steve Beresford, who appears on the second CD only, is allowed to completely improvise. The work's origins in free improv are obvious, while its formal unities can take a little longer to appreciate.

The result is a remarkable conceptual advance, that further narrows the divide between improvised and composed music – that's composed in the narrow sense of mostly score-based music, fixed and involving repeated performances. That synthesis is evident in the collection of names referenced in the seven movements – Braxton, Zorn, Christian Wolf, Pauline Oliveros, Sun Ra, Terry Riley, Louis Andriessen – which share some stylistic affinities with their inspirations. Freed draws on a panoply of stylistic devices, not excluding grooves – "Hidden Hand" on the second disc develops a thunderous one.

On "Kilter", for John Zorn, Elliot Galvin's furious piano solo presages a roiling, boiling instrumental polyphony. "Starlings", in complete contrast, is a gauzy, quiescent tribute to Christian Wolff that slowly gains in substance.

Andy Hamilton

Natural Information Society
Since Time Is Gravity
Eremite/Aguirre 2xCD/DL/2xLP

Natural Information Society (NIS) built up such a head of steam in 2019 that even the pandemic had a hard time slowing it down. The combo's concerts that year, played by a touring incarnation comprising Joshua Abrams on guimbri (a three-stringed Moroccan bass lute often played during healing ceremonies), Lisa Alvarado on

new from Cold Blue music

Peter Garland
The Basketweave Elegies

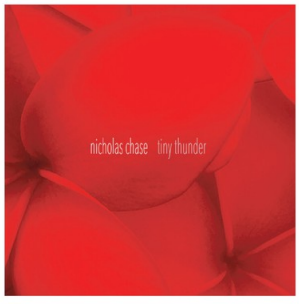
"Garland is . . . a marvelous artist. I admire his work a lot"
—Harold Budd

"Garland's music seems to be about the sheer expressive power of sound itself."—*Fanfare*

Michael Byron
Halcyon Days

"One of those contemporary composers who can justifiably be classed as crucial. . . . Byron's music dances with tremulous iridescence."
—Julian Cowley, *The Wire*

"Byron's music is immediately comprehensible and beautiful, while it remains experimental."
—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*



Nicholas Chase
Tiny Thunder

Chase's music has been described as **"brilliant"** (*The Strad*), **"quietly provocative . . . compelling"** (*Textura*), and **"most imaginative"** (*LA Weekly*).

www.coldbluemusic.com

harmonium, Jason Stein on bass clarinet and Mikel Patrick Avery on drums, typically consisted of hurtling performances of a single composition.

Each concert felt like it was a segment of a larger piece of music that stretched without beginning or end. With the release in 2021 of *Descension (Out Of Our Constrictions)*, a concert recording of the piece made at London's Cafe Oto with Evan Parker, listeners learned its name, and also acquired a means to keep the thread unspooling.

Since Time Is Gravity reckons with the need to stop and take stock. It reconfirms NIS's links to Chicago jazz history and practice, and also digs deeper into music from outside of that tradition. The music was recorded live during two day-long sessions, mostly with an expanded line-up that refracted Alvarado and Stein's repeating patterns across four more horns, doubled the percussion, and featured tenor saxophonist Ari Brown as soloist on three pieces. The septuagenarian's presence links NIS to a Chicagoan tradition of extroverted tenor saxophonists, and his raw, soulful contributions propose another way to hear its music.

Instead of getting lost in the trance, one can experience Abrams's arrangements as conciliatory interventions that reconcile the formal structures of minimalist music and jazz's opportunities for individualist expression. Dubwise mixing draws out solos and enhances other details, facilitating a more reflective form of meditation upon music that is part of a continuum connecting the ancient to the future.

Bill Meyer

Bill Orcutt
Jump On It
Palilalia CD/DL/LP

Bill Orcutt's first solo acoustic guitar album in a decade features some of the most conventionally beautiful music he's made. On previous acoustic releases such as *A New Way To Pay Old Debts* (2011), Orcutt wrangled toothy and clangourous tones from a Kay catalogue guitar, occasionally accompanying his playing with gnarly Keith Jarrett-like vocalisations.

His weapon of choice on *Jump On It* is a 1960s Harmony Sovereign, an inexpensive model used by Jimmy Page on "Stairway To Heaven". Its tone is sweeter and more resonant than the Kay, but the high action of the strings and Orcutt's tough right hand attack ensure the music is never too finessed.

The ten original compositions of *Jump On It* tap into rich seams of American music, from country blues and hymns, to free jazz and avant rock. As such, they form a continuity with his recent electric recordings – the liquid Richard Thompson meets Tom Verlaine blues of 2019's *Odds Against Tomorrow* and the intricate lattice of last year's *Music For Four Guitars* – as much as the earlier guitar soli. There's even a trace of Harry Pussy's noise rock in Orcutt's fierce precision picking and flash fire runs.

On "The Life Of Jesus", Orcutt works over a faintly luminous old timey folk melody, disrupting the minimalist repetition with a series of pull-offs and percussive thumb sweeps that briefly ignite into improvisatory flourishes. He soon draws it back in, meditating on the original theme with the sparest of ornamentation.

"The Ocean Will Find Its Shore" and "In a Column of Air" live up to their evocative titles, with Orcutt's unresolved minor key melodies and thoughtful rhythmic patterning giving the music a beautifully airy quality. That carries through to the title track, its reflective theme gaining an emotional urgency with Orcutt's tremolo picking and needling upper range figures.

Stewart Smith

patten
Mirage FM
555-5555 DL

This is the first ever album made from text-to-audio AI-generated sound sources. Damien Roach aka patten describes himself as (among other things) a "cultural researcher" – which makes this release feel like an experiment performed with the listener as guinea pig. Roach has found a system called Riffusion, which produces sounds according to written descriptions. He then scoured hours of lo-fi recordings from Riffusion sessions before chopping and sequencing and layering the tiny fragments into *Mirage FM*.

The result comes across as having been crafted with a crate digger's attention to detail, but using entirely different sources, lacing together tiny shards of degraded digital detritus spanning the history of recorded sound. Each short track hurtles through contrasting sonic worlds and eras, to the point where the listening brain's habits of historic placement and contextualisation are forced to abscond entirely. Soulful vocal shards hit spacy ambient whorls of sound, rhythms refuse to coalesce, pellucid guitar lines are in danger of perpetual derailment. The brain can't locate anything purely human, vainly searching for an ego or soul behind this unfolding wonder, and so ends up responding to surface. Every time I put this record on I'm both delighted by some of the soundworlds accidentally conjured but also left utterly confused as to what I'm responding to.

2023 is unlikely to produce another record that provokes so many quandaries about the future of music and how our responses might also have to become de-analogued and digitised. Recommended? Yes. Confusing? Hell yes. Will it make more sense as AI music evolves? Is sense even something required from futurist pop? *Mirage FM* poses many such questions, offering little in the way of answers.

Neil Kulkarni

The Reds, Pinks & Purples
The Town That Cursed Your Name
Slumberland/Tough Love DL/LP+7"

Glenn Donaldson was a fixture in the pages of *The Wire* back in the 2000s through his work as part of folk-psych clan Jewelled Antler Collective and their many (many, many) affiliated projects and groups. Jewelled Antler went silent over a decade ago, but Donaldson is what you might call a lifer, and today he principally records solo under the name The Reds, Pinks & Purples.

Aesthetically speaking, the music is a far cry from Jewelled Antler's field-recorded improv wanderings, swinging instead for a sleek distillation of melancholic 1980s jangle pop: think The Smiths, McCarthy, early REM. Even at his most avant, though, Donaldson's songwriting cultivated a pop urge, and his recent run of music places that tendency in colourful sharp focus.

The songs Donaldson writes as The Reds, Pinks & Purples tackle a few core themes, chiefly the life of a guy in a band and what it's like to live in a state of perpetual economic precarity – the natural consequence of being said guy in a band living in a town like San Francisco, a former countercultural centre neutered by an influx of big tech capital. Donaldson's lyrics tend towards the observational, and are often delivered with a wry turn of phrase that can be laugh out loud funny: *"It's a shame your record label failed/ Too many problems with the mail"*, goes the opening couplet of the album's title track.

Donaldson's no voyeur though. On "Life In The Void" or "Too Late For An Early Grave" he's clearly singing about himself or those just like him, fellow music lifers who wonder if they ought to quit, but know they're in too deep. *The Town That Cursed Your Name* juggles pathos and bathos throughout, most obviously on "Break Up The Band", a tender piano finale that muses deliciously on what it's like when the tour van's wheels finally come off. *"Go solo if you can/Everyone will understand/Break up the band"*.

Louis Pattison

Alasdair Roberts
Grief In The Kitchen And Mirth In The Hall
Drag City CD/DL/LP

Throughout his career, Scottish vocalist, musician and songwriter Alasdair Roberts has regularly toggled between deep explorations of the folk tradition – collecting and interpreting tunes stretching back centuries – and projects built around his own songs, which triangulate around that same tradition via his own compositional talents and an aesthetic openness that stretches the convention.

Last year he released *The Old Fabled River*, a dazzling collection of original music made with Völvur, a collective of Scandinavian musicians who straddle the divides between folk, jazz and experimental practices. Now he follows suit with a collection of time-tested gems – mostly Scottish, with a few Irish detours and one from the Prince Edward Islands in Canada – accompanied by only his own acoustic guitar or piano, where his curatorial vision is matched by vocals which have never sounded so assured and impressively soulful.

As with many great folk singers, Roberts is a student of the tradition, encountering centuries-old songs for the first time or learning regional variations of familiar themes through recordings, concert performances by colleagues and historical archives. Five songs on this album, for instance, were found within the sound archives of the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh. Unsurprisingly, most of the songs chronicle the human condition – love affairs crushed by violence, tragic

The ambitious new ensemble project *London Brew* reruns the voodoo down

By Kurt Gottschalk

London Brew
London Brew
Concord Jazz 2xCD/DL/2xLP

The four shoes of Miles Davis and Teo Macero are often filled but rarely with a good fit. Their work together in the 1960s and 70s – bringing jazz into the realm of studio invention that had redefined rock in recent years – has been referenced, reworked and repurposed time and time again. But attempts to recreate what the two of them, and Davis's powerful bands, conjured in the studio generally fall short of the genre-defining albums the trumpeter and producer sculpted.

One such tribute might have been a concert organised by producers Bruce H Lampcov and Martin Terefe, planned to mark the 50th anniversary of Davis's *Bitches Brew*. An impressive assemblage of British improvisors was set to perform at London's Barbican Centre in November 2020, a concert that was cancelled along with most public events around the world. Instead, the producers and 11 musicians (Terefe doubling on guitar to make it an even dozen) set up shop for three days in a decommissioned North London church repurposed as a recording studio and made one of the more impressive pandemic projects yet to hit the market.

Through splicing and radical editing, Davis and Macero gave a form beholden to spontaneity permission, in a sense, to mess with the moment. Studios and stages are different things, and those differences were already being exploited in popular music. 50 years later, the practice is commonplace, but at the time Macero's heavy repurposing and retrofitting of the Davis band's studio sessions were radical and, to some, a violation of the sacrosanct scriptures of jazz. Lampcov and Terefe picked up the methodology and, reportedly, had further permission direct from Davis's son and nephew to be "fearless and stay loose", which is what they did. The producers prompted improvisation with short sound samples but they didn't try to recreate the original album, which is what makes it work. They took the process as a challenge. They defined the moment, captured the moment, then redefined it in post.

The success of *London Brew* isn't in trying to emulate the original *Brew* but, presumably, in inspiring the players to live up to the concept. The album feels both of the original vintage in its occasional psychedelic trappings and, masterfully, altogether new. But, perhaps most importantly, it richly rewards repeat listens. It's a dense record, but not an overly busy one, and different instruments bubble to the top with each run through. The initial shock of the Davis album lay in the electric keyboards, basses and guitar; the first defining sounds of *London Brew* are, likewise, electronics. Club DJ, BBC selector and fashion show soundtracker Benji B and frequent Terefe collaborator Nikolaj Torp Larsen (they've worked together on records by Donovan, Amy Winehouse, Adele and CeeLo Green, among many, many others) make a bed that sometimes calls back to the synthesizer bloops and jet streams of the 70s, at other moments, sounds altogether 2020s, laying propulsive beats over the drums of Dan See and Sons Of Kemet's Tom Skinner.

The tuba of Theon Cross (also a Son Of Kemet) soon distinguishes itself in the lower realm, resounding against the deep end of electronics and Tom Herbert's bass. The saxophones of Nubya Garcia and Shabaka Hutchings unsurprisingly dominate much of the time, and there's no trumpet to be heard, but the session is rich with texture. Raven Bush's violin and electronic effects positively sing on the lovely, elegiac 13 minute closer "Raven Flies Low".

The first half of the album – available as double CD, double LP and download – floats beautifully through the title track, just shy of 40 minutes in two parts. The second half comes in quicker punches, starting with "Miles Chases New Voodoo In The Church", referencing the studio and muse as much as "Miles Runs The Voodoo Down" on the original album. That track imagines a much fantasised meeting between Davis and Jimi Hendrix, a dream that seems to re-emerge on the subsequent ten minutes of "Mor Ning Prayers", one of the strongest tracks on the set. Breakbeats are given a New Orleans second-line slant by Cross's insistent groove with a psychedelic swirl of electric guitar and unidentifiable tonal washes obliviously underneath.

Did Lampcov and Terefe need to cite their sources in marketing their record? Probably not, but then again, why not? It was the starting point that brought them to a new end point. Is it a record that will stand the test of time the way Davis and Macero's project has? Again, probably not, if only because it will likely be lost in a daily downpour of recorded music against which Davis never had to fight. But it's a fine record, a loving tribute that has a place alongside Orchestrova's Coltrane reclamation *Electric Ascension* and Eric Dolphy's *Out To Lunch* as realised by Otomo Yoshihide's New Jazz Orchestra. Rarely is retro so now. ○

Running for Miles: London Brew

Nathan Weber

circumstances or the supernatural. The tropes are so engrained in cultural consciousness that it's all about the details, and on "The Convict Maid" Roberts even adds a couple of his own verses.

Elsewhere he veers outward, including three songs about animals – a trusty steed, a lost cow and a waterbird respectively, though the latter tune, "The Bonny Moorhen", is a coded Jacobite-era political allegory. On the plaintive love ballad "The Lichtbob's Lassie" Roberts brings a powerful tenderness to the delicate melody, expertly teasing out subtle accents with his voice over an unfussy piano accompaniment. Here he locates what feels like fresh, potent terrain for further exploration.

Peter Margasak

Bruce Russell
Circuits Of Omission: Sonaten Für Synthetisierten Klang (Opus 60)
Feeding Tube DL/LP

Clinton Williams is a latterday exponent of Kiwi ingenuity, a cultural point of pride holding that a New Zealander can fix anything with some fencing wire and whatever is laying around the tool shed. Since 1990 Williams has been releasing tapes and CD-Rs under the name Omit. Using homemade electronic instruments and repurposed household items including dustbins and broken freezer motors, the Blenheim resident makes music that evokes vast internal voids.

The Dead C guitarist, *Wire* contributor and fellow south islander Bruce Russell has been a staunch supporter, having issued some of Omit's music on his label Corpus Hermeticum and provided sleevenotes for a box set released by Pica Disk. On *Circuits Of Omission*, Russell turns Williams's gear to his own ends. The differences between the two aesthetics is instantly evident – Omit's long tones, simple melodies and steady rhythms typically play out over long spans of time, but only one of the 15 tracks on *Circuits Of Omission* approaches three minutes, and most are under two. And while Williams polishes his sounds to a cold gleam, Russell's galvanic outbursts are coarse and jagged enough to snag the loose threads on your coat.

Russell also loads his brief pieces with conceptual freight quite different from Williams's affective allusions. He has dubbed them sonatas. While strictly accurate, since they are solos that are played and not sung, his application of the term to short bursts of noise shows contemptuous disregard for the structural prescriptions and preening puffery of institutionalised culture.

Some are dedicated to places and figures of significance. "Sonata Number 5 (The 'Detroit Sonata')" abstracts techno to an intermittent buzz. Just what the agitated crackle of "Sonata 14 (Paul Feyerabend)" has to do with the titular philosopher of science is unclear, but hey, he made you look him up. Others, such as the sputtering "Sonata Number 1 For Dipolar Switch", reference the parts that made them. In aggregate, the contents of this short album argue that homemade noise is as handy as any other tool for inducing experience and conveying meaning.

Bill Meyer

Sightless Pit
Lockstep Bloodwar
Thrill Jockey CD/DL/LP

Sprouting from the extreme/experimental scene around Portland, Oregon based project The Body, the first incarnation of Sightless Pit included drummer Lee Buford (The Body), vocalist Dylan Walker (Full Of Hell) and Kristin Hayter (aka Lingua Ignota) and materialised on 2020's debut album *Grave Of A Dog*. Synthesizers replaced the guitars that dominate their other bands, Walker's caustic screams paired with Hayter's liturgical vocals on pulsing near-EBM instrumentals.

The second incarnation of Sightless Pit continues without Hayter, but Buford and Walker are not alone. For *Lockstep Bloodwar* they hooked up with a diverse array of kindred spirits, including emo-ambient composer Claire Rousay and Gravediggaz MC Frukwan. Buford and Walker take the role of curators, tailoring each track for its respective guest, the result being that *Lockstep Bloodwar* feels like a mixtape, layering hiphop and dub-inflected beats in a manner that recalls Kevin Martin's work as The Bug.

There's an unexpectedly laidback vibe throughout, though the lyrics still sting like salt in a wound, recalling lines from the Nihilist Memes page on Reddit. Where Walker's screams used to feel suffocating, his hissing vocals here are mixed back in order to serve the beat. The bouncy "Calcified Glass" features punchy lines from late Three 6 Mafia rapper Gangsta Boo while "Reisin On A Knife" establishes a dry ice ambience with pitch-shifted bass and Madeline 'Midwife' Johnston's dreamy vocals (*"A dopesick life strings you along/You won't miss me when I'm gone"*).

The plethora of guests – Boredoms' YoshimiO and Walker's Full Of Hell bandmate Spencer 'Industrial' Hazard also appear – illustrates Sightless Pit's taste and reach, the album as a whole demonstrating the project's commitment to subverting expectations.

Miloš Hroch

Sleaford Mods
UK Grim
Rough Trade CD/DL/LP

There's been something perversely enjoyable about being a bystander to Sleaford Mods' rise. After years of trying to make it through mainstream music channels, Jason Williamson formed Sleaford Mods in a spirit of kamikaze bitterness at the industry that spurned him, and in the process somehow found the big crowds and critical adulation that had long proven elusive.

The following years have seen a rupture with the underground scenes that, for a period, Sleaford Mods called home. If you liked their early tunes, you'd probably like the later stuff too. But a fascinating tension ran through albums like 2019's *Eton Alive*, Williamson and production maestro/beer can holder Andrew Fearn grappling with how to square their vituperative, anti-everything stance with the fact it had also become the unlikely source of a comfortable career.

UK Grim handles this dissonance with slightly more ease, largely by returning to first principles. Slightly rawer and more aggressive than the duo's last couple, Fearn's productions cleave towards the minimal and raw, stripped right back to choppy beats and lurking bass. Lyrically, meanwhile, "Tilldipper" and "Smash Each Other Up" sketch a bleak national picture: degradation of the public sphere, decadence and corruption in the private.

Success has not diminished Williamson's need to grind an axe, which may not be pretty or noble, but is at least honest and undeniably consistent with what came before. "D.I.Why" is not really directed at what *Wire* readers would understand as DIY, but more at Sleaford Mods' accidental children – a generation of performatively aggro post-punk bands that, in Williamson's words, *"look like Fred Dibnah"*. In a similar vein is "So Trendy", perhaps the record's most prominent misfire – it's hard to know exactly who's in the crosshairs here. It doesn't help that the song features Dave Navarro and a rapping Perry Farrell from Jane's Addiction; literal aliens to *UK Grim*'s otherwise fiercely localised vision.

A collaboration that lands better is "Force 10 From Navarone", which pairs Williamson's East Midlands nadsat with the dry intonation of Dry Cleaning's Florence Shaw. It's moments like this – angry, funny, sweary, oblique but working to a mysterious logic – that remind you why Sleaford Mods felt special, while proving that success hasn't neutered the nature of their critique.

Louis Pattison

Surgeon
Crash Recoil
Tresor DL/2xLP

"Techno is just a framework to hang something else onto," Anthony Child told Derek Walmsley in *The Wire* 318. Similar to Regis's and Drexciya's daring transmutations, the DJ and producer's works as Surgeon use techno as a Trojan horse – a way of sneaking in industrial, dub, noise and metaphysical concepts into his music. At his best, it results in eclectic but captivating combos of disquieting subliminal messages and hypnotic beats.

Yet this strength of Surgeon's style worked against him on 2018's *Luminosity Device*. Overburdened by influences drawn from The Tibetan Book Of The Dead, the album's conceptual framework didn't quite translate into the music, leaving a shell of danceable but hollow sounding techno.

Whether that was already a symptom or a precursor to what Child calls "uncertainty in his role as a techno producer" in the announcement for his return to Berlin's Tresor is unclear, but the journey of self-discovery that followed certainly benefited him. As the title and enraptured crowd on its cover suggest, *Crash Recoil* is a back to basics affair, one which captures the energy, momentum and feedback of a live set, then channels it into electrifying tension within tracks and a much better sequenced whole.

The breathless dub detonations that open "Oak Bank" are soon revealed as a misdirection, when a concoction of drilling pulses, spectral noise and sweeping pads thrusts "Second Magnitude Stars" and

Former Cows/Melvins bassist Kevin Rutmanis presents two new albums of post-pigfuck

By James Gormley

Cattle scarred: Kevin Rutmanis

Dunn With Rutmanis
Crackpot Whorehead
Rock Is Hell DL/LP

hepa.Titus
unEat
Rock Is Hell DL/LP

Minneapolis, Minnesota's Cows might have been the quintessential Amphetamine Reptile band. Possibly not the feted Chicago label's bestsellers, but their fused surrealism and surliness was often the very cut of the label's jib. In short, imagine comparably gnarly Chicago imprint Touch & Go eyeballing you in a dive bar at the end of a day that saw them dumped before lunchtime and fired after.

That gives them a special status in the history of the idiom known in polite company as noise rock. Veteran critic Robert Christgau's more colourful epithet, pigfuck, coined in a disparaging Sonic Youth review, was worn lightly with a smirk by some borderline respectables. But the unruly AmRep cohort, Cows included, were perverse enough that they could have been buried in it.

Bassist Kevin Rutmanis has been the most visible former member since Cows split in 1998, starting a lengthy tenure in Melvins shortly thereafter. He would serve a shorter stint with Tomahawk, a supergroup of sorts convened by Mike Patton during a busy decade between Faith No More's split and reunion. Since 2011 Rutmanis's main project, alongside guitarist/vocalist Sterling Riley and drummer Paul Christensen, has been Los Angeles based trio hepa.Titus. Their latest album on Austrian label Rock Is Hell is titled *unEat*, presumably referring to the message board vernacular that bypasses content moderation; see the use of unalive for context. With that allusion in mind *unEat* isn't as abject an experience as you might expect. It's fucked and fried, but dental records are not needed to identify it as psychedelic art-damaged punk with the demeanour of a West Coast *Locust Abortion Technician*. Album highlights include a nauseating sludge cascade accompanied by Riley's baritone engine stall on "Dead Hands" and stroboscopic guitar beams fit to burn the pineal retina on "New Dizzies".

Crackpot Whorehead is Rutmanis's second collaborative album with Mr Bungle bassist Trevor Dunn (periodically supported on percussion by Lee Afentopolous of the Perth band Neomantra) following 2021's *Glen Krupa World's Great Drummer*. By comparison with *unEat*, it largely disregards rock protocol and structure, while sharing its arch humour and misshapen skew. Formally it's a more textural, spatial, cinematic and, at times, seemingly improvisatory release. Throughout a phantasmagoric assemblage of found sound, feral freeform noise and trilling strings we hear the kind of sinewy, bass-led chamber arrangements that track more closely to Dunn's output with the Tzadik label and its associated ensembles. He's been embedded in that network for decades and the affiliation with Tzadik label boss John Zorn – whose ties to the freak rock and quasi metal fringe are well known – dates back at least to Zorn's production of Mr Bungle's self-titled 1991 debut.

Other NYC Downtown references come to mind in unexpected ways. The menacing low key funk of "Mime Om" for example, could be Material at their most simmering. But, in line with their derangement, Dunn and Rutmanis's funk is something more like a fetor, a melting waxwork of funk, cack-handedly restored by Stephen Stapleton using some cracked doll's eyes, stolen dentures and rusty springs. ○

"Metal Pig" into an unstoppable four to the floor rollercoaster. Like a rave, it peaks in the middle, right as the stomping kicks of "Leadership Contest" and the wispy hi-hats and scythe-sharp synths of the Jungian "Masks & Archetypes" trigger euphoric release. While ultimately not as inventive as some of Child's earlier outings, *Crash Recoil* is nevertheless an urgent, kinetic techno record.
Antonio Poscic

Keith & Julie Tippett: Couple In Spirit
Sound On Stone
Discus CD/DL

A spontaneously composed suite in eight parts, Keith and Julie Tippett's *Couple In Spirit* (1987) is one of the most beguiling albums in either artist's catalogue. Using their multitracked voices, piano, harpsichord and percussion, the duo created a deeply personal music. Ritualistic, elemental and beautiful, it sounds like little else. In 2019, the Tippetts made plans to record a follow-up, but the pandemic, followed by Keith's death in the summer of 2020, put a halt to that.

Last year, Julie Tippett returned to the project, using Keith's live solo piano recordings as the basis for new music. "It's Rain And Rain" is perhaps closest to the 1987 album in its dense thrum of tremolo piano chords and multitracked vocals, yet there's a greater emphasis on song, with Julie unveiling a gorgeous melody reminiscent of singer-songwriter Laura Nyro.

It's tempting to read the lyrics of "Riding" (*"You carry me on a wind of song, save me when I fail"*) as a tribute to Keith, her bluesy alto moving over a galloping bass figure. "Improvisation" finds Julie weaving golden threads of sound between Keith's resonant chords: the detuned twang of a zither, musical boxes, high vocalese. The appearance of Keith's voice towards the end stops you in your tracks. The title track nods to 1987's "The Choir And The Sunset Improvisers", with Julie's fervent chorus channelling Gaelic psalms, jazz opera and English folk.

As Discus boss Martin Archer writes in the sleevenotes, "Julie had to dig deep into her every reserve of strength and determination in order to make these recordings." *Sound On Stone* is an act of love comparable to Alice Coltrane's completion of tracks she and John had worked on together before his death. The results are profoundly moving, full of beauty and surprise.
Stewart Smith

Buzz Osborne

Yves Tumor
Praise A Lord Who Chews But Which Does Not Consume; (Or Simply, Hot Between Worlds)
Warp CD/DL/LP/2xLP/MC
Recent explorations in the realms of rock – the psychedelic 2021 album *Heaven To A Tortured Mind* and the moody goth rock of 2021 EP *The Asymptotical World* – have established Sean 'Yves Tumor' Bowie's reputation as a rock star on the rise (at least according to *The New York Times*). For their third album, Bowie draws retro rock colours from grunge, post-rock and post-punk, reaching for a heightened expression of pop music.

It starts with a shriek and the sound of rhythmic laboured breathing that breaks out into the dark post-punk of "God Is A Circle". The music is excitable and itchy, with fuzzed out bass and shards of guitar noise, Bowie's detached murmur calling attention to a lyrical sense of displacement: *"There's parts of me I still don't even know yet/I wander around I just feel like a nobody"*. With a breezy falsetto on "Parody" they chide, *"A parody of a pop star/ You behaved like a monster... can you spell it out for us/Run it back in slow motion"*, as the texture escalates its intensity with a dredging coda played at half speed, Bowie's slowed down voice sounding monstrous indeed.

Confident and nuanced production from Noah Goldstein (Frank Ocean, Rihanna, Bon Iver) shines on "Meteora Blues" and "Operator", whose respective grunge and post-punk references feel specific to millennium-era reiterations of those styles – nu metal and the indie post-punk revival. The precise evocation of those specific moments in cultural time brings an emotionally loaded dimension to the songwriting when Bowie sings of old friendships and boredom in "Lovely Sewer" and of lost childhoods in "Heaven Surrounds Us Like A Hood".

Praise A Lord is a record conceived and assembled with considerable care – literate, theatrical and elegantly audacious.
Leah Kardos

Tutto A Posto E Niente In Ordine
Various
Nashazphone DL/LP
The title of this record is an old Italian phrase which roughly translates as *Everything Is Fine, Nothing Is In Order* – a conversational pleasantry invoked in times of chaos. It feels a fitting introduction to the record itself, an excellent compilation of Italian tape music that swings the spotlight over a number of contemporary Italian artists using reel-to-reel tape in an electroacoustic or musique concrète style.

Despite the academic history of these styles, Nashazphone's Hicham Chadley envisaged this as a more playful exercise, a notion reinforced by the cover image of the Italian politician, intellectual and pornographic actress Moana Pozzi. The Sicily born Valerio Tricoli – probably the best known artist here – senses this mood of mischief, kicking the compilation off with "Total Recall", a track at least partly (perhaps entirely) made with audio material gleaned from Paul Verhoeven's 1990 film of the same name. The film's themes (derived from author Philip K Dick's 1966 novelette *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*) of memory, both real and implanted, feel suited to this kind of audio reconstruction work; Tricoli takes sci-fi sound effects and hammy dialogue, and morphs them into long, shimmering corridors of sound interrupted by the occasional jump cut or scrambled signal.

Elsewhere, *Tutto A Posto* feels like a whistlestop tour of moods and strategies. SEC_'s "Orogenesi" is as close as the compilation gets to straight noise, a miasma of throbbing synthesized textures and slamming impacts. "Dorsoduro" by Mercury Hall – aka Matteo Castro, founder of stalwart Italian label Second Sleep – weaves together something tactile from a multitude of microscopic details, the huff of breath, the sound of a distant conversation, the creak of a door. One highlight is Ezio Piermattei's "Pupils' Sleep", a sombre six minutes that by turns surfaces radio static, spooling tapes and swells of ancient sounding organ.

Tutto A Posto E Niente In Ordine is in and out in seven tracks and a touch under 40 minutes – just enough time to give a glimpse of this fertile underground of tape musicians and get out of there, leaving you wanting more. Another volume would be welcome.
Louis Pattison

Utopia Or Oblivion
Various
Constructive DL/LP
In 1969, the American architect and futurist R Buckminster Fuller published a collection of essays titled *Utopia Or Oblivion: The Prospects For Humanity*, intended to guide Spaceship Earth towards the former and away from the latter. Thinking about his work now, in a time when anything other than humanity's doom is difficult to believe, he can represent a final bastion of hope in the potential of technology and ideas.

However, Fuller's futurist optimism might resemble a tombstone to some people, a stark reminder of all the things we could have done but never did. SN Variations sister label Constructive has collected a series of pieces created in reaction to Fuller's essays, the contributing artists moving variously between utopic optimism and obliterative doom.

The compilation begins buoyantly with Robert Lippok's "How Would I Be? What Would I Do?", whose beats stretch across a bright, shining structure. It is followed by No Home's "Plans", which sets a bank of chorales slowly swelling towards optimistic climax. However, as the piece progresses, fields of electronic hum and crackle derail its upbeat trajectory. Several of the other musicians also opt for this darker direction. Adrian Corker's "Drawing A Circle To Step Out Again" shows us a rumbling vista of broken industrial clatter and intermittent fogs, while Adam Janota Bzowski's "Samael" is Caretaker-esque in its melancholic piano drift, evoking a similar sense of disorientation and loss.

The most affecting moments of *Utopia Or Oblivion* are those which sit ambiguously between optimism and pessimism. Richard Skelton and Corey Fuller's "Embrace Fiercely The Burning World" in particular sends shivering strings across vocals which slip in and out of brightly illuminated haze, conjuring an uncertain mixture of hope and despair. These moments feel the most truthful, acknowledging humanity's precarious position as it teeters on the edge of some dark fate, but embraces the futuristic flashes of hope which occasionally shine through the chaos.
Spenser Tomson

Dan Weiss Trio
Dedication
Cygnus CD/DL
Brooklyn based drummer and composer Dan Weiss has used jazz as a platform to engage with unrelated styles. His duo with guitarist Miles Okazaki dives deep into Indian metres while the Starebaby quintet postulate a hybrid of jazz, extreme metal and horror soundtracks. The opposite holds on *Dedication*, in which the drummer's diverse concerns referenced all get drawn back into the piano jazz idiom.

"For Nancarrow" is named for Conlon Nancarrow, whose used player piano rolls to orchestrate time signatures and harmonies that no human pianist could play. While the piece features some tricky overlapping drum cycles and convoluted lines, it swings with a fluidity that is miles from its dedicatee's orchestrated avalanches. While "For Andrei Tarkovsky" aspires to invoke the spiritual essence of the Russian director's films, what registers is the escalating tension between Jacob Sacks's lush piano and for momentum generated by Weiss and bassist Thomas Morgan, and the way the rhythm players gradually dispel it during the piece's final moments.

"For Tim Smith" is dedicated to the late leader of Cardiacs, but the only thing it has in common with the UK post-prog outfit's music is its convoluted construction. Even when Weiss slips in some extra kickdrum beats that make it sound like the record's skipping, Morgan and Sack keep things rooted in a decades old piano trio vernacular. Something similar happens on "For Jacob" which honours the session's pianist by giving him some finger-crampingly complex lines to play. Nothing impedes his and Morgan's execution of the tune's fiendish maneuvers, not even the leader's drum 'n' bass-inspired stutter.

With Starebaby, Weiss used jazz to cast funhouse mirror reflections upon other forms of music. On *Dedication* though, it's an absorbent material.
Bill Meyer

Alan Wilkinson/Steve Noble/John Edwards
Forth To 4th
Ping Pong CD
The trio of reedsman Alan Wilkinson, double bassist John Edwards and drummer Steve Noble is such a longstanding and well-liked fixture on the UK improv scene that it's a surprise to discover they've only previously released three albums, two of them well over a decade ago.

Their 2007 studio date *Obliquity* announced a ferociously full-throttle attack that owed more to US fire music by the likes of Charles Gayle's trio with William Parker and Rashied Ali than the scorched earth antics of Europeans Peter Brötzmann, Fred Van Hove

and Han Bennink. A couple of live albums – *Live At Cafe Oto* (2009) and the belated *3 Of A Kind (Live At Iklectik)* (2018) – presented the trio in their element, roaring through rambunctious sets to appreciative London audiences.

Released on Noble's Ping Pong label, this return to the studio feels a little tentative by comparison. That's partly due to the shorter track lengths, ranging from just two and a half to around 11 minutes, which frame vignettes more concise and considered than the free-ranging ebb and flow of the longer live improvisations. Some of these have an almost painterly consideration of more delicate timbres, such as "Call 1" in which a drooping bass clarinet slides up against arco smears and flickering brushes.

That said, the trio still find plenty of opportunities to flex their muscles. Wilkinson, on alto and baritone sax, is a convincing proponent of the art of eternal ascension, letting out long looping phrases that seem inexorably to climb ever higher towards some ultimate delirium, until the trance is shattered by Noble and Edwards's masterly ability to shift gears at the flick of a switch, diving into furiously dense churn and toppling power swing.

Daniel Spicer

Xiu Xiu
Ignore Grief
Polyvinyl CD/DL/LP

Jamie Stewart doesn't care about making friends, the sole purpose of their Xiu Xiu project being to process and reflect – perhaps even eject – the horror of being alive. Fittingly, *Ignore Grief* is a terrifyingly human sound document/fantasy that won't win you friends, or even redemption. But if you let it in, it might just move you.

"What a godawful wonder is man", intones Angela Seo on first track "The Real Chaos Cha Cha Cha". Seo sings on one half of the record, Jamie Stewart on the other, and the album is roughly split between "experimental industrial" and "experimental modern classical" – alternating real life trauma with hyperbolic takes on early rock 'n' roll teen tragedies. The duo are joined by new full-time member David Kendrick (Sparks/Devo/Gleaming Spires) who contributes lyrics and percussion.

The seethingly turbid flow of the album existentially flickers constantly between world-inflicted trauma and self-excoriation. As ever with Xiu Xiu, it would be easy to be shocked by the arrhythmia and atonality of tracks like "Esquerita Little Richard" and "Border Factory" – but what's more rewarding is letting these transmissions connect with your own sense of internal and external derangement, even if the songs are utterly alien to standard notions of songcraft.

Xiu Xiu's approach to sound, informed by post-punk and industrial, feels cut adrift from anything that's happened in those areas before. Each moment of songs like "Dracula Parrot, Moon Moth" and "Maybae Baeby" feels charged with the impulse not to repeat a single motif from the past, but to explore pure feeling and tragedy in sound. Pitiless, but ultimately forming a sanctuary for Xiu Xiu's irredeemable sadness, *Ignore Grief* might just be their most startling record to date.

Neil Kulkarni

Contrabassoonist Thomas Stone presents a questing album of low end minimalism

By Rosie Esther Solomon

Thomas Stone
An Act Of Surrender
Bloxham Tapes DL/MC

The contrabassoon is an instrument that sounds one whole octave below what is transcribed on a stave. This attribute becomes immediately apparent in Thomas Stone's new album which employs the instrument alongside drum machine and activated snare.

Stone takes this earth-shattering tone and pushes it to unexpected timbres. It is supposedly "physically and acoustically" impossible to make a very slow descending glissando on the instrument, but that's exactly what we hear within the first part of this four-part suite. It's not only this glissando which sees Stone defy the boundaries of what is possible with one instrument; throughout the album he consistently pushes himself and his sound into grey areas full of questions and indefinite articles.

The decision to release this music on the physical format of cassette tape is deliberate. The format allows the piece to, if not breathe, then at least come to an abrupt halt between sides. The pause comes between the mellower textures of the first two parts and the percussion – like an excruciatingly slow march – of "Part 3". Physicality manifests in the instrument too, with listeners able to hear Stone's breath blowing and fingers tapping the keys. In his own words, "It isn't an acoustic instrument with electronic backing, rather there is a symbiotic relationship between the contrabassoon and how I affect it electronically. Similarly the symbiosis continues between my snare drum and the percussive sounds I use."

To say that Thomas Stone plays the contrabassoon is not a falsehood, but it's not the whole picture. Stone also coaxes the activated snare to rattle in unsettling arrhythmias. The contrabassoon often whines rather than blares as he commands the physical space of the instrument's noise and reins it in, restraining its potential to overcome all else.

Is surrender active or passive? Do you exist within the higher force you surrender to, or are you consumed by it? Thomas poses these questions in some background information on the album, and it's clear that this music – which swells in uncertainty yet never fully resolves – is a musing on those existential queries. Building on his previous recording, 2021's *Host*, *An Act Of Surrender* is methodical and cautious in its progressions, the foghorn-like tone of the contrabassoon feeling like the echo of something unknown that has come before and then vanished. The slow and low tones are deliberate in the micro, just as they are querying in the macro, a carefully thought through question without an answer which rings out in the empty sonic space that the bass tones carve for us, then leave behind. ○

Caught in the act: Thomas Stone

Henri Kisielewski

The Columns

Avant Rock
by Joseph Stannard

Big | Brave
Nature Morte
Thrill Jockey CD/DL/LP
The latest album from Montreal, Québec trio Big | Brave roars into action with the immense "Carriers, Farriers And Knaves" and proceeds through five subsequent tracks whose heaviness is substantially derived from a keen sense of texture – abetted and encouraged by producer Seth Manchester – and the anguished wail of guitarist/vocalist Robin Wattie. Big | Brave could be described as metal adjacent but as indicated by their 2021 collaboration with The Body, *Leaving None But Small Birds* – which took successful detours into Appalachian folk – they frequently conjure spirits from outside the headbanger realm. "The Fable Of Subjugation" for instance echoes the abject end of late 1980s Throwing Muses before hurling itself into a cycle of brutal repetition, while "A Parable Of The Trusting" glowers like Crazy Horse sitting in on a Death Factory recording session.

Boris
Fade
Fangs Anal Satan DL
The umpteenth Boris album demonstrates that the Japanese riff merchants are still luxuriating in the purple patch that produced *NO* (2019), *W* and *Heavy Rocks* (both 2022). *Fade* leans into the drone metal end of group operations, its six tracks of lugubrious churn exuding an atmosphere of frostbitten horror quite distinct from the overdriven warmth of early elongations such as *Absolutego* and *Amplifier Worship*. The cumulative effect is somewhat akin to being crushed by a slowly descending iceberg as hostile wights unhelpfully circle and wail. *Fade* is Boris at their most merciless and indifferent, surveying a frozen landscape with impassive eyes, gazing into deep time as continents break apart and crunch together.

Brainiac
The Predator Nominate
Touch & Go DL/LP
Recently reformed electroshock rock outfit Brainiac expel a nine-track archival collection of bits and pieces (nothing here runs to three minutes and the whole thing lasts a quarter of an hour) which, while inessential, certainly isn't dull. The opening title track is a blinkered burble with an insistent bassline, followed immediately by the lockstep squelch of "Kiss Of The Dog". "Smothered Inside" finds late vocalist Timmy Taylor adopting a bratty yet menacing persona familiar from 1993's full-length debut *Smack Bunny Baby* and its 1994 follow-up *Bonsai Superstar*. "Going Wrong" is in a similar style but with added atonal weirdness. The scrappy, fragmentary nature of these pieces enhances the feeling of itchy unpleasantness that made Brainiac and comrades such as Rhode Island's Six Finger Satellite so vital in the 1990s, before the post-punk revival and electroclash arrived with dopier takes on similar source material (Tubeway Army, Devo, et al).

Death Valley Girls
Islands In The Sky
Suicide Squeeze CD/DL/LP
According to Death Valley Girls vocalist/organist Bonnie Bloomgarden their new album is intended as "a message of love and acceptance" – which may indeed be the case, but that doesn't mean it isn't an unsettling experience, its suspension between sweet and sinister evoking the similarly dualistic oeuvre of film maker Gregg Araki (*Totally Fucked Up*, *Nowhere*, *Mysterious Skin*) along with the occult California of the Manson Family and the Agape Lodge. These vistas are haunted, for sure. Bloomgarden sings as though stuck between this world and the next – multitracked, swathed in echo, potentially a harbinger of ruin – as she and her bandmates crank out a soupy, spectral strain of garage psych. The highlight is "Journey To Dog Star" which rumbles ominously across a horizon of its own making while mirage-like sonics shimmer beneath an open night sky. Songs to shiver 'n' shake to.

Night Goat
Totem
Black Donut DL/LP
It's tempting to dub *Totem* the best sludge metal album I've heard for aeons, but there's a lot more going on here than your typical Eyehategod/Crowbar worship. Though Canton, Ohio's Night Goat aren't short on toothsome riffage – as their Melvins derived name might suggest – their music isn't so much dense and monolithic as raw and reproachful, dipping into skeletal Bauhaus (or early Soundgarden) mode ("Blood Circles") and Sonic Youth circa *Bad Moon Rising* dissonance ("Death Crow Dance") with vocalist Julia Bentley's demonic charisma cutting through the bloody miasma. Bentley plus guitarists Chris Bentley and Mike Ramone, bassist Dalin Jones and drummer Donnie Casey form a tight, nimble unit, and they've assembled a set of dynamic, propulsive songs. Night Goat's 2019 debut *Milk* was impressive, but this is a new plateau for the band. Goat only knows what the future has in store.

Screaming Females
Desire Pathway
Don Giovanni CD/DL/LP
The eighth album by New Jersey's Screaming Females opens with "Brass Bell" – whose intro riff is a dead ringer for the one that kicks off "Turning American" by UK scuzzballs The Wildhearts. Probably a coincidence, but also evidence that the trio know how to rock. *Desire Pathway* is crammed full of such hookish delights, dominated by the terse vibrato and crunching riffs of Marissa Paternoster, a bona fide guitar hero with a choppy, economical style that recalls new wave axe wielders Rick Nielsen (Cheap Trick) and Elliot Easton (The Cars) as much as Tom Verlaine (RIP). Paternoster locks in with bassist Mike Abbate and drummer Jarrett Dougherty for 34 minutes of joyous thump with no filler in sight. A tough but open-hearted and ultimately life-affirming rock record.

Critical Beats
by Chloe Lula

Agonis
Gamma Ray
Midgar DL/12"
The first time I heard the hallucinatory cosmic pulse of Swiss artist Agonis's "Gamma Ray", I was on the upstairs dancefloor at Fuse club in Brussels, frantically recording the DJ over my iPhone voice memos. Shamelessly sleuthing the next day, I sent the audio file to the opener who played it. He identified the track as the A side from a forthcoming release on boutique Berlin imprint Midgar – a label that has maintained an excellently curated catalogue of fathoms-deep techno and melancholic IDM. This EP is the third from Agonis, whose work has previously only featured on his own Amenthia Recordings. Sitting somewhere at the intersection of leftfield dance and liquid drum 'n' bass, each track emits a nebula of wobbly oscillations and curling synth lines that sound like the hiss of idling auditory nerves suddenly sizzling to life.

Linn Elisabet
47034
47 DL/12"
An artist with a unique background in choral orchestration and gender studies, Linn Elisabet, an emerging DJ and producer from Berlin, has brought a singular vision of operatically infused dancefloor production to the world of broken beat and hardcore rave. Their debut release on Tommy Four Seven's 47 imprint is a particularly novel exploration of these parallel academic interests; it eschews straightforward electronic programming for euphoric breakbeats and sublimely sung (and spoken) word that mix the fury of peak-time techno with the grandeur of contemporary classical. Two of the EP's tracks, including "Emotion Vs Affect (I Hear Too Much)", tread more traditional dancefloor territory with easy to mix percussive lines and galloping industrial noise. But it's bookended by pieces that give shape to the artist's more conceptual goals, unusually pairing narrated theoretical texts with deft allusions to church choirs.

DJ Gigola
Fluid Meditations
Live From Earth DL
Fans of DJ Gigola's high octane sets may not have seen this release coming. *Fluid Meditations* – an eight track continuous mix of dance hall, field recordings and ambient techno – reflects on the humourless hedonism of nightlife culture with playful (if not somewhat half-baked) meditative spoken word. As listeners, we are guided through invocations to feel gratitude and quiet our minds. *"Whatever we may perceive appears and disappears/Comes and goes"*, she says on "Presence Practice", a raga-like composition that creeps dangerously close to cultural appropriation and the Westernised wellness industry. But cliched concept aside, there's something endearing about Gigola's yogic commentary. "Unfolding Practice" is one such moment on the LP, pairing Goa trance's gated vocal pulse with beautiful ligatures of melody and rhythm.

Last Life
Tensor
Samurai DL/12"
With *Tensor*, Italian artist Last Life returns to the renowned label Samurai with an extremely on-brand collection of greyscale drum 'n' bass. Some sonic distinctions set this EP apart from the imprint's most recent slew of functional releases, though, including a rave ready synth lead on opener "Offside" and a not so straightforward rhythmic pulse on "Incubus", which craftily cuts galloping polyrhythms mid-phrase in an effect not unlike the jarring gear shifts of a racing car. If the other tracks hew more closely to Samurai's distinct aesthetic identity, that's OK; each piece pierces and pummels with dexterous ferocity, imprinting their dark energy on a label that has made both menace and ultra sleek precision its hallmarks.

Shifted Phases
The Cosmic Memoirs Of The Late Great Rupert J Rosinthrope
Tresor CD/DL/3xLP
Over the last year Berlin label Tresor has put out a volley of standout releases that look towards a new aesthetic while still tipping a hat to the institution's roots and original canon. One of its first and most fitting LPs of 2023 is a relatively unknown 11 track reissue from the late James Stinson, one half of seminal electro duo Drexciya. First put out in 2002 as part of the Drexciyan Storm Series – a seven-part album concept elaborating on the duo's Afrofuturist mythos – the label has rescued it from beyond, bringing its superb narrative and artistry to fresh ears. *Cosmic Memoirs* largely departs from the pensive melodies innate to much of Drexciya's work, using a sparse and mangled sound palette redolent of digital space flight readouts and meteoric sweeps to deliver electro-techno of the highest calibre.

Aa Sudd
Pushedd
Midgar DL/12"
In January, Midgar made its first gesture towards dark drum 'n' bass with the mesmerizing *Pushedd* EP from Aa Sudd. A fellow Amenthia Recordings artist (releasing as Vector Trancer and Konsudd, a duo with Dutch musician Konduku), the shadowy producer demonstrates a mastery of the grey area sound with four tracks that refract dubstep through a technoid lens. Opener "Pselum" nods to Donato Dozzy with its swampy interplay of deep, psychedelic sound design and stuttering grooves, while the B side is more muted and slyly swung; "QPP" is a particular standout, suspending cloudbursts of electric synths over a rippling bassline, its spare accents like brush strokes on a white canvas.

Tygapaw
Love Has Never Been A Popular Movement
Fabric Originals DL
Despite being a longtime stalwart of Brooklyn's underground techno scene, Tygapaw has seemingly undergone a musical revolution over the last two years alone, exploring more intimate and adventurous tropes with each subsequent release. Their debut album *Get Free* plugged directly into 1990s Detroit techno circuitry with its warm grooves and robotic thump. And while *Love Has* uses a similar musical grammar, its syntax has been scrambled. "Glamour" for example pulls from the same snarling sonic palette and club-ready mood as their past work. But with its fusion of reggae-infused rhythms and soulful vocals, the song is a generic chimera that interpolates the artist's Jamaican roots with the language of pop. The same approach is applied to the single "MYSM", a peak-time anthem that uncannily coheres T-Pain-like Auto-Tune to a jacking industrial beat. The result is fusion made for the dancefloor, and it's Tygapaw's best and most daring output yet.

Vril
Animist
Delsin DL/3xLP
German artist Vril has had a prolific career as a purveyor of atmospheric techno cuts that tug at the heart strings with their soulful, almost saccharine, melodies and cavernous dub. In that regard, *Animist* doesn't disappoint. The artist's fourth full length on Delsin explores early 2000s-era house-y shuffles and weeping synthesized strings. There are few moments that dip or drag, with each song discharging a chugging four-four kick line and a Panorama Bar-worthy hook. There's even a high point with "Love Rollout", a moody floor-filler which mines the warbling euphoria that made EPs on labels like Giegling and Innervisions the stuff of hits. While the producer does not reinvent the wheel with this release, it's deliciously listenable on repeat and comforting in its nod to nostalgia.

VT Trad
Spray
Kalahari Oyster Cult DL/12"
Step Ball Chain, Radiant Love and Planet Euphorique are among the labels that have managed to build a canon of releases harnessing the cotton candy gloss of big Goa earworms without relinquishing quality or submitting to revivalist tags. Kalahari Oyster Cult is perhaps the standout imprint from this cabal of contemporary trance enthusiasts, and its most recent EP, the lip-biting four tracker *Spray*, is right at home in the catalogue. At times more house-y than hypnotic, it excels in its proggiest moments – in the title track, and on the B side's "Slipped". Throbbing, indulgent and ambiguously sexual, these songs are synonymous with the last two years' cheesy but cool ilk of hedonistic club tunes.

Dub & Reggae by Steve Barker

Creole/Chinafrica
Journey From Creation 1975–1985
Chinafrica/Digikiller 2xLP
This pet project from Brooklyn's Digikiller boys comes to fruition at last in the form of a double set showcasing the work of Wayne Chin, frontman of the bands Creole and Chinafrica, with one album dedicated to vocals and the other to dubs/versions. The deep roots sounds of the singles "Beware (Of Your Enemies)" and "Jah Creation" are already well known by roots collectors, given their multiple Channel One represses over the years, but the rest of the catalogue, as well as both bands' backstories, took some crate digging. Chin was actually driven by a desire to escape the reggae aesthetic and take both bands into the realms of Earth, Wind & Fire and even rock bands like Kiss! Thankfully the latter was a bridge too far, and what we have here is a set of originals and covers (Horace Andy's "Skylarking", Ken Boothe's "Moving Away") that sit well in a roots collection – but "Beware" remains their key contribution to reggae.

Dambala
Revelations
Emotional Rescue DL/2xLP
The excellent UK based Emotional Rescue label continues its mission of bringing into the light music from the melting pot of a 1970s and 80s West London scene in danger of being lost and forgotten. This one cuts Dambala's single releases from that era into two heavyweight 12"s. Named after one of the most important spirits of the African diaspora, Dambala rose out of the bubbling hot multicultural music hub around Harrow Road and Ladbroke Grove, where young Nigerian Augustus Anyia met guitarist Alvin Christie in 1975. Jimmy Lindsay produced and sang on the band's 1978 debut "Zimbabwe". Then on their own label ISIS, they released "Rebel/Militant", featuring Militant Barry as deejay and Dennis Bovell as engineer. They followed it with "Rally Rally Round", "Babylon" and, with Anyia's partner Pauline Catlin from legendary reggae vocal group Brown Sugar (alongside Caron Wheeler), the deep rootical and horns-led "Me And My Dread". All said tracks are featured here with their dub versions.

Robert Ffrench
Wondering
333 DL/LP
The latest from Death Is Not The End's sublabel 333 is this first-time reissue of Robert Ffrench's 1985 pedigree dancehall set

Wondering. A cousin of the great Pat Kelly, singer and producer Ffrench was born in central Kingston, Jamaica in 1962. He made his first records in 1979 at the age of 17, and went on to cut a series of roots and dancehall sides, his biggest tune being his 1989 combination style track "Bun & Cheese" partnering deejay Clement Irie. His music was recorded at Herman Chin-Loy's Aquarius with the help of serious sessioneers Sly & Robbie, Dwight Pinkney, Robbie Lyn, Burning Spear's drummer of choice Nelson Miller and Ronald 'Nambo' Robinson, with Beres Hammond on occasional backing vocal. Ffrench achieves a bright and lively sound away from some of the sparser dancehall of the era, with little bit of rub-a-dub and a nod to lovers. Standout is the title track "I Am Wondering". Elsewhere a nice deejay piece, Shortie Ranks's "Dance In A Skate Land", can be found on Jamwax.

Lee 'Scratch' Perry & Friends
Open The Gate
Music On Vinyl/Trojan 3xLP
First time reissue for this splendid set compiled by Steve Barrow and released in 1989 when the reggae revive industry was in its infancy. It still stands as the best collection of Lee 'Scratch' Perry's late 1970s work at the Black Ark, bringing together tracks of undoubted production genius such as Devon Irons & Dr Alimantado's "Vampire", The Heptones' "Mistry Babylon", Junior Delgado's "Sons Of Slaves" and The Upsetter's own "City Too Hot". How these genius sides remained out of sight of the masses at the time of their original release is beyond comprehension.

Seekers International
No Parasites EP
Sneaker Social Club DL/12"
Seekers International return to Bristol's Sneaker Social Club, the label trading in foundational UK sound system bizzness, where they last touched down with the *RaggaPreservationSociety* EP back in 2017. Every release comes with a signature sonic stamp, their promiscuous clash of breaks, unashamed use of the stabbed pause button and cross-genre spread of vocal samples all coalesced into a ragga dub swirl. "No Parasites (Lickshot!)" brings fevered junglist loops in from their well-stocked sample bank, while the big beat of "Caught Up (Heart Breaks)" layers a brittle snare under the rat-a-tat-tat of the repeated title and woozy blues breaks. Fuzzed and hazy chat occupies the space on "2 Gold Chain (DriveUCrazy)" but "Original Of The Original" truly lives up to its name with the pompous swagger of its intro, incessant breaks loop and hair-raising synth under the incessant chant.

The Sound Of Bed-Stuy
Various
Dub-Stuy DL/LP
There's never really been a proper appreciation or overview of the key part played by New York in the development and preservation of reggae and dub over the years. Not only was the city second home to the likes of Studio One, Randys, Jammys and many other producers, New York's also played a key role in the creation of hiphop and more discrete sub-genres like illbient. The Brooklyn based Dub-Stuy are a ten year old sound system collective and label with a uniquely fresh take in building new connections in a "contemporary dub-inspired soundscape". *The Sound Of Bed-Stuy* compiles ten tracks featured in the short documentary of the same name. These include a few VIP dubplates from the Dub-Stuy archives, much of which came together within a supportive sound system culture operating during the pandemic. The big tunes here include Dubamine & Blackout JA's "Nicodemus", Dub-Stuy & Jahdan Blakkamore's anthemnic "Absolutely" and Von D's dubplate mix of "Surrealiste Skank", a psychedelic tribute to King Tubby. All the catalogue is on Bandcamp.

Electronics
by Sam Davies

Cruelle
J'ai Remplacé L'amour Par L'argent
Avon Terror Corps DL/MC
Cruelle's debut for Avon Terror Corps adds a Parisian node to the sprawling Bristolian collective that currently involves the likes of Bad Tracking, Bokeh Versions and Giant Swan. This is a break-up collection, but in the delirious 'cut up their clothes' vandalism tradition of break-ups rather than mournful window gazing. There's a general jouissance to be felt in the way dub, industrial and layered chanson vocals are chopped and screwed together here, with plenty of rough edges and loops that refuse to sit just so, from the stuck-record stumble of "La Parade Du Serial Killer" with its monster film brass, to the seething sub-bass that pushes the hazy dub space of "But" past the red into speaker damage territory.

Druid & Jok
Terminals
Decaying Spheres DL/MC
This collaboration came out of the eerily vacant spaces of London in pandemic lockdown, and it's a little uncanny to register the way in which some of the same vibes and moves Druid & Jok are reaching for here had already been prefigured in releases by Burial or Lee Gamble. *Terminals* hollows out rave sounds to create a paradoxical loneliness ("London Frequencies" or "Empty Room"). The duo describe the set as ambient, but while it is largely beatless, it never truly comes across as happy to play the background; the more present it is, the bolder its arpeggiations and freehand trance lines, the more Druid & Jok's mutual vocabulary comes into its own.

Fever Ray
Radical Romantics
Rabid CD/DL/LP
Stockholm based artist Karin Dreijer aka Fever Ray's first album since 2017's *Plunge* draws on the deep crosscurrents at the heart of synth pop (dancing with tears in your eyes) and glam (finding a home and identity in constant disguise and artifice) to build a suite of songs that reflects these ambiguities and tensions to the last production detail. Lyrically, Fever Ray dwells on the infinite possibilities and inevitable end of love and desire. Pop hooks and club-ready rhythms warp with bubblegum plasticity from track to track, never repeating but luxuriating in the excess of their own ideas.

Grand River
All Above
Editions Mego DL/LP
Grand River's third album follows a couple of sets for Donato Dozzy's Spazio Disponibile imprint. The work of Aimée Portioli, a Dutch-Italian sound artist based in Berlin, *All Above* takes familiar tropes from ambient synth scenes – chugging arpeggios, washes of tone – but arrives at them as often as not via older acoustic sources such as the piano, organ, guitar, strings and voice. Yet the music retains a distinctive patina, as if painted in the autumnal browns and ambers of old master oil painting. The effect subtly rewrites Grand River's antecedents away from the typical modular new age-isms towards a more vintage analogue psychedelia: Cluster, Talk Talk, or Mike Oldfield.

Lizzitsky
Miasma Jester
Never Sleep DL
The title track of Lizzitsky's second EP for Gabber Eleganza's Never Sleep label takes a handbrake turn through lo-fi grime rhythm, day-glo synth hooks, harsh noise burst and some truly vicious handclaps. "Miasma Jester" has a deadpan hyperactivity reminiscent of Venetian Snares or Kid 606's breakcore splatter of yore. Recorded across Venezuela, Uruguay, and the now departed London Elephant & Castle shopping centre, the rest of the EP subsides into something less intense but no less wired, its low resolution sonics evoking a kind of overstimulated twitchiness familiar from Vessel's post-grime productions. Lizzitsky zeroes in unerringly on a noise colour which, like a macro dose of caffeine, is invigorating – until it's exhausting.

Evita Manji
Spandrel?
Pan DL
Tzusing
Green Hat
Pan DL/LP
Athens based singer and musician Evita Manji's new set on Pan makes an intriguing counterpart to Fever Ray's return, with overlaps in its emotional and sexual ambiguity, but Manji's arrangements pick up on the hi-tech shapeshifting productions of Arca and SOPHIE, in which synths, samples and signals morph and mutate into new hybrid forms, underpinned by tectonic bass drops and overlaid with clouds of siren pop vocals. Meanwhile, Manji's labelmate, Taiwan based producer Tzusing, releases his second Pan album – a 40 minute workout of power-lifting beats, expressing the sweaty, tops-off pheromones of gabber but through a mildly retro cyberpunk. You could easily imagine "Exascale" or "Gait" soundtracking a nightclub scene from a late 1990s dystopian film like Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*.

Zoë Mc Pherson
Pitch Blender
SFX DL/LP
With rhythms that feel inspired by library clips of boxers punching speed balls into a blur, and tones that borrow from the deadpan panic of public safety alarms, *Pitch Blender* demands your attention from start to finish, constantly pushing notionally club sounds into experimental spaces. "On Fire" has a machine gun snare keeping time over a bassline that swoops down and holds a single note for bar after bar, as if on a dare. "The Spark" nearly pulls itself apart with the centrifugal energy of its own overlapping percussion elements. But once you've adjusted to the accelerated bpms of Berlin based French-Irish sound artist Mc Pherson's internal thought processes, there's also a wealth of detail in their sound design to sift through, which has a pleasurable intricacy of texture that recalls Katie Gately.

Kate NV
WOW
RVNG Intl CD/DL/LP
Listening to Moscow musician Kate Shilonosova's latest album as Kate NV is initially like being launched into a soft-play ball pit, where you're submerged in bouncy, primary coloured sound objects constantly on the verge of going pop. Her production revels in a kind of plastic disposability which, like fairy lights, veers fearlessly towards the kitsch or faux naif. Found Sound Nation's *Broken Orchestra* sample pack is a favourite tool, a library of acoustic instruments in the just-off vein of Portsmouth Sinfonia. But Kate NV's sense of play works at a deep grammatical level, particularly in her witty inversions of scale. Small sounds, squeaks, blips and twinkles are inflated into starring roles; boices are shrunk to decorative background shimmers. As with The Pastels, Haruomi Hosono or Pierre Bastien, *WOW* reminds you that playtime deserves serious attention.

Orbital
Optical Delusion
London CD/DL/2xLP
Orbital have always had a half-baked, wake-up-sheeple side, dating back to 1994's *Snivilisation*, and right up to the title of this, their tenth album. Combining mid-1990s rave with The Medieval Baebes singing "Ring A Roses", its opening track veers dangerously into accidental Steeleye Span steampunk while trying to reflect on the pandemic. But *Optical Delusion*'s seven different guest vocalists yield wildly differing results, ranging from hits to misses. "Dirty Rat" with Sleaford Mods' Jason Williamson comes on like a raging update of Leftfield's "Open Up"; "You Are The Frequency" with The Little Pest sits over a smoke-belch bassline, while the same vocalist finds unexpected spaces in "What A Surprise", a slow roller in which musical elements ricochet around the mix like loose fragments of clockwork.

John Wall
v01 (ds-singularity)
Bandcamp DL
Using the flexibility of Bandcamp as a platform, London based electronic composer John Wall has recently settled into a rhythm of releasing tracks in twos or threes rather than album length collections, of which "v01 (ds-singularity)" is the latest. Characteristic of Wall's compositional style, its five and half minutes map out a very cellular song, recording a series of episodic developments rather than describing one long arc. It begins in an ambiguous place: a voice filtered into abstraction, or noise manipulated to resemble speech? Wall kneads and folds these events, blurring tone into percussion, consonant into vowel. When it concludes you're left with the frustrating sense of being cut off from eavesdropping on a cryptic conversation.

Global
by Francis Gooding

Ahl Nana
L'Orchestre National Mauritanien
Radio Martiko DL/LP
An almost all-female family band rather than a national orchestra, Ahl Nana were led by the Timbuktu born Mint Soueid Bouh, who claimed descent from a revered Moorish musical family. A virtuoso on the one-stringed rababa and a renowned composer of popular songs, she took Ahl Nana to fame across the Sahara from Mali to Morocco as the first Mauritanian group to incorporate Western instruments, including accordion and electric guitar. The album selects ten magnetic and affecting sides from the few precious recordings they made in Casablanca in 1971, the only time they ever put music to tape. The transporting elation of the vocals on opener "Adji Kar Teri Miri" is worth the price of admission on its own.

Son Rompe Pera
Chimborazo
AYA DL
A youth misspent in punk and psychobilly outfits seems to be the key factor for Mexico City's Son Rompe Pera, led by marimbistas the Gama brothers. Their father played the wooden marimba, popular as a folk instrument in southern Mexico, and as children the brothers learned alongside him in markets, streets and house parties. *Chimborazo* steps with rough, full throttle cumbias dominated by the ribcage rattle of the marimba, while surf punk skeletons shake their way out of the closet.

Dur-Dur Band Int
The Berlin Sessions
Outthere CD/DL/LP
The Dur-Dur Band always rolled with an unmistakable bass-heavy momentum, humid and forceful, tempered by years on the once thriving Mogadishu coastal hotel circuit. Decades on from their 1980s heyday, their sonic instincts are intact. *The Berlin Sessions* captures them enthusiastically reunited and in very fine fettle. There is no change to the formula: soaked in reverb after the classic fashion, the brooding funk of "Hasha Geel" or the loping dhaanto bounce of "Heeyaa" give the impression of a band who know exactly what they're best at, and that they're still the best at it. Faadumina Hilolwe's electrifying vocal performance on "Love My Love" is a glorious

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The Free Music
The Free Music Part 1
Habibi Funk CD/DL/LP
Brainchild of Libyan guitarist Najib Alhoush, The Free Music's bold mid-1970s disco funk bears all the hallmarks of its era: massed horns in blazing arrangements, lithe basslines tethered to the one, an acrid craquelure of guitar. After initial successes, the band fell foul of Colonel Gaddafi's ego: Alhoush was imprisoned for two years and was released only after promising make a propaganda album in praise of the Brotherly Leader. Problems continued, nevertheless. Alhoush was repeatedly threatened by the regime and his international career stymied, but he nevertheless managed to self-fund a dozen cassette releases for *The Free Music. Part 1* gathers sides from a period in which the bandleader seems to have been listening intently to The Bee Gees and ABBA – not a bad thing, especially when expertly upcycled into funk grooves as lean and focused as "Hawelt Nensa Ghalaak" or "Free Music II".

Iftin Band
Mogadishu's Finest: The Al-Uruba Sessions
Ostinato CD/DL/2xLP
A neat historical companion to the refurbished Dur-Dur Band's *Berlin Sessions*, Ostinato's latest despatch from the Horn of Africa gathers cassette-era sides from the revered Iftin Band, resident outfit at Mogadishu's prestigious Al-Uruba Hotel and soundtrack artists for Somalia's national theatre. Culled from mid-1980s releases on the Shankarphone label, *Mogadishu's Finest* lives up to the billing. Supremely confident and versatile, the band blend style and genre with consummate ease, moving from elastic reggae rhythms on "Ruuney" and "Hobolada Hooyibo" to off-kilter Afrobeat on "Wiikii Aan Ku Waaashee", all while mixing in a hefty dose of southern Somalia's percussion-rich banaadiri rhythm.

Insólito Universo
Ese Puerto Existe
Olindo CD/DL/LP
Dreamcore explorations into Venezuelan folklore from three-piece Insólito Universo, running the gamut of national rhythms from gaita and joropo to lesser heard Afro-Venezuelan styles including tamunangue and fulia. A delicate folk-jazz sensibility is dominant, with songwriter Maria Fernanda Ruette's vocals to the fore over backing that varies from the busy synthesizers of "Ventana Honda" to raw hand-drums and harmonies on "Fulia De Cacaotal". Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier turns in a lovely cameo on the Stereolab-ishly bloopy "El Chivo".

Polobi & The Gwo Ka Masters
Abri Cyclonique
Real World CD/DL/LP
As one might expect from Real World, *Abri Cyclonique* is very much a production made to an unreconstructed world music template. Polobi, presented here as a mystic who taught himself to sing deep in the forest of Guadeloupe, is paired for his first ever studio recordings with the production of Liam Farrell, better known as Doctor L. Traditional gwo ka can be an austere affair, often just drum and vocal; complimenting the eponymous drums, Farrell has gone for loose-limbed dubwise jazz as the cushion for Polobi's plangent singing. There's precedent: the gwo ka moderne scene moved the music into similar spaces, and Dao's eternal "Chen'n La" is the obvious model here. On gully-deep tracks like "Driv", the production conjures the echoing majesty of Polobi's beloved forest; it works, but pictured on the back there's a pile of the tapes that Polobi records for himself in the woods, and I wish we knew what was on them.

Jaffar Hussain Randhawa
Guldasta
Hohiunhoni DL
Recorded on a Karachi rooftop, *Guldasta* is a magical document: Ustad Jaffar Hussain Randhawa, probably the most senior living clarinettist in the Hindustani classical tradition, in conference with his favoured tabla and harmonium players, Riaz Ahmed and Muneer Hussain, respectively. The clarinet is rarely used in Hindustani classical, but the flexibility it affords makes it a good fit, able to bend toward the small intervals and produce the smooth glissandi essential to the art. The title *Guldasta* means bouquet, and Randhawa gives the gift generously across five ragas and thumris. He's a breath-taking player, and each exploration becomes steadily more Dolphy and brain-twisting the deeper he dives.

Za! & La TransMegaCobla
Za!
Discrepant DL/LP
Raucous trans-Mediterranean neo-folklore from the composite group Za! & La TransMegaCobla, in whom no fewer than three outfits are fused: Catalan cobla wind-ensemble experimentalists La MegaCobla, zone-coasting DIYers Za!, and avant garde vocal duo Tarta Relena. The group sing in a resurrected Phoenician tongue, with Tarta Relena taking the lead through sharply defined close harmonies. The cobla group assume the role of a chaotic horn section, while Za! tie everything together with joyous post-punking about. Boisterous full moon music, convulsed in borderless ecstasies of transformation.

Hiphop & R&B
by Mosi Reeves

El Michels Affair & Black Thought
Glorious Game
Big Crown CD/DL/LP/MC
Mere months after *Cheat Codes*, his collaboration with Danger Mouse, The Roots' rapper Black Thought returns with a new collection of "streams of thought". *Glorious Game* features music from El Michels Affair, a New York ensemble led by Leon Michels. The deep funk veteran garlands Black Thought's words with a heavy bottom, making for an experience that's less psychedelic and decorative than *Cheat Codes*. Although Black Thought doesn't stray from the tendencies that distinguish his solo material from his work with The Roots – breathlessly stacking bars without hooks – he sounds more reflective this go-round, reminiscing about being young and in love on "Miracle", and discussing the reasons for his sobriety on "Alter Ego". Meanwhile, El Michels Affair handle the choruses, including a nice turn from soul singer Kirby Lauryen on the title track.

Jadasea & Laron
The Corner: Vol 1
10k DL
The Corner: Vol 1 pairs Brooklyn producer Laron with London rapper Jadasea. The latter's oeuvre consists of bright boogie-soul loops with the treble cranked up, a bright background for Jadasea to issue bars like *"Can't diss me, the disturber"* and *"Enemy of the state and whoever plays us"*. Some of the cuts like "Tony Yayo" venture into Boldy James-like territory, the new version of the backpack thug stereotype, and come off like dudes freestyling with little sense of purpose. But other cuts find him exploring his paranoia and fears, like "Murky", as Laron frequently intersperses the sound of falling rain. The overall portrait is of a block hugger lit up by various substances and sorting through his neuroses with his fellow soldiers.

Lil Yachty
Let's Start Here
Quality Control Music/Motown DL/2xLP
Upon its release in January, Lil Yachty's *Let's Start Here* drew initial praise for his druggy yet decidedly well-manicured dream pop. Days later, he generated an equally intense backlash by claiming that he feels he's an artist instead of a "mumble rapper". But don't blame Yachty for thinking so little of rap as an artform. He comes from a generation that views the genre as a moneymaking pop idiom instead of a cultural inheritance bestowed by Kool Herc, The Last Poets and many others. Despite his pretensions, *Let's Start Here* has a middlebrow sensibility, with plenty of grooves Calvin Harris would approve of. Its best moments come when he unleashes his oddball trill, an evocative sound that bland sentiments like *"So surreal, the vibes I feel"* can't quite diminish.

Maxo
Even God Has A Sense Of Humor
Def Jam DL
"Trying to make a dime in this world of lies", raps Maxo on "Still", the opening track of *Even God Has A Sense Of Humor*. The Southern California rapper tends to linger when he flows, and he often punctuates his lines with a wry drawl. His songs find him questioning life, but his targets sound indistinct, more a product of his neuroses than physical threats. *"I'm just trying to be free, I'm just trying not to burn everything I touch"*, he says on "Free!". Overall, the production on *Sense Of Humor* is brightly rendered, a shift from the lo-fi musings of 2019's *Lil Big Man*. The Madlib produced "48" is a standout, and so is R&B innovator keiyaA on "Onedayatatime". Near album's end, Maxo seems to stretch out into a series of gauzy harmonies, as if the vape smoke has finally lulled his restless mind to sleep.

Andrew Mbaruk & Rhys Langston
Affect Theory And The Text-To-Speech Grandiloquence
Black Market Poetry DL
Despite its title, *Affect Theory And The Text-To-Speech Grandiloquence* feels less severe than Andrew Mbaruk's past work. With a flat, plainspoken delivery that resembles a bemused university lecturer, his voice still takes some getting used to. But producer Rhys Langston supports him with an array of musical wild cards, from the jumpy digital funk of "Dylan Thomas And James Baldwin Walk Into A Bar" and boiler room beats of "Affect Theory", to the meandering chamber pop of "A Dial-Up Theology". Langston's sure hand allows the Canadian poet/rapper to shine, yet Mbaruk remains an enigma. "Discovery Of The Tubman Boson" takes shots at Nobel Prize-winning physicist Peter Higgs, while "A Dial-Up Theology" shifts from *"the deer"* to *"the seer"* sniffing a rose to *"the rapper hanging by the rope of his random words"*.

Nappy Nina
Mourning Due
LucidHaus DL
With cameos from indie stars such as Moor Mother and lojii, *Mourning Due* is arguably Brooklyn via Oakland rapper Nappy Nina's most ambitious work to date. It's a meditation on grief and sadness, and its best moments, like "Peddles" with Ohmi, dip into buttery, soulful grooves and engaging introspection. Only three of the 14 songs top three minutes, and Nina, who raps in a soft yet insistent cadence, tends to rush through her lines in double time, as if she can't wait to get her thoughts out. Even when confronted with a languid, jazzy blues like "Tucked In" alongside MAVI, she peppers it with lyrics. Given the subject matter, the frisson between the quietly meditative tone of *Mourning Due* and her motion-filled overthinking feels honest.

Skech185 & Jeff Markey
He Left Nothing For The Swim Back
Backwoodz Studioz DL/LP
Despite working on the fringes of subterranean rap for over a decade, Chicago to Brooklyn rapper Skech185 has generated an impressive amount of chatter for *He Left Nothing For The Swim Back*, his collaboration with producer Jeff Markey. It's partly due to the emergence of Backwoodz Studioz as an indie powerhouse as well as Skech185's pleasingly aggressive style. He raps like he's slamming dominoes on the table. But unlike billy woods, who makes a guest appearance here, Skech185's narratives are relatively straightforward, even if the vocabulary can get dense. *"Boxcar skeleton/Groundskeeper for elephants/ Cutting tags on fire hydrants"*, he boasts on "Jay Street". The final two cuts, parts one and two of "Western Automatic Music", sound like Boards Of Canada's early breakbeats.

Spectacular Diagnostics
Raw Lessons
Rucksack DL/LP
Raw Lessons finds Chicago producer Spectacular Diagnostics building with British rappers like Kid Acne, CLBRKS, Sonnyjim and King Kashmere, while quoting from the likes of Angela Davis and *Barton Fink*. The sound is contemplative, if not quite as dusty as 2021's *Ancient Methods*: there's even a midtempo disco groove in the form of "The Played List". Meanwhile, film critic and turntablist Marcus Pinn accompanies him on a handful of instrumentals, with "The Brain" being a particular highlight. A handful of guest appearances stand out, including underrated avant rap veteran Juice Aleem on "How I Feel", and Curly Castro and Defcee on "Class". Defcee's verse is particularly barbed: *"What I wish I could say at the front of the class/While students watch footage of kids catching slugs in their backs"*.

Steel Tipped Dove
All The Weight Feathers Don't Have
U Don't Deserve This Beautiful Art/Fused Arrow DL/LP/MC
Steel Tipped Dove's latest *All The Weight Feathers Don't Have* will satisfy those who miss the sound of hard drums on rap records. The Brooklyn producer alternates between stark boom-bap-styled loops and raps from a phalanx of guests. The vocalists don't always blend in with the tapestry, and often feel like an expedient way to make this more than a mere beat tape. Still, there are standouts, like when Donwill says *"Loving me is like trying to make a statue smile"* on "Smiling Statue", ShrapKnel boast over "Flying Obelisk", RAP Ferreira and AJ Suede signify on "Spectral Analysis", and Harvey Cliff MC unfurls an odd seduction on "Measure Each Step".

Jazz & Improv by Andy Hamilton

AVA Trio
Ash
Tora CD/DL
Ash is an "archaeo-musicological study of the imaginary music of the ancient cities of Knossos and Pompeii, buried under ash". AVA feature two Amsterdam based musicians, Giuseppe Doronzo on baritone saxophone mouthpiece and neck, mizmar mouthpiece and percussion, and bassist Esat Ekincioglu. Percussionist Pino Basile, based in Altamura, researches traditional frame and friction drums of the Mediterranean. From the Southern Italian putipù, its soundbox topped by a membrane with bamboo cane attached, he developed the cupaphon instrument, which he plays here. Over two eventful tracks totalling 20 minutes, the trio create magical, evocative sounds that mix ancient and modern.

Jim Black & The Schrimps
Ain't No Saint
Intakt CD/DL
Relocated from Brooklyn, drummer Jim Black leads a band of young Berlin musicians – alto saxophonist Asger Nissen, tenor saxophonist Julius Gawlik and bassist Felix Henkelhausen. "The past year I began to feel musically restless," he explains. "I made a band that reflects this urgency and energy." But then he's perpetually restless, seeking new sounds and grooves. From Balkan rhythms he created a powerful asymmetric language, clearest here on "The Set-up" and "Crashbash", and more freely interpreted on "Riversgardens". "No Pull" is a plangent ballad/midtempo number with a straight groove. A full on album, packed with incident.

Peter Brötzmann/Heather Leigh/Fred Lonberg-Holm
Naked Nudes
Trost CD/DL
Recorded in Brötzmann's hometown of Wuppertal during his 80th birthday celebrations, *Naked Nudes* features Heather Leigh (pedal steel guitar) and Fred Lonberg-Holm (cello). Brötzmann on alto and tenor saxophones is unusually elegiac. The tone is still piercing, but the music is slower. At times it approaches a meditative mood, but the saxophone playing is always intense – sound and fury are never far away. An evocative passage in the long title track features a resonant dronescape, after which Brötzmann plays as tenderly as I've ever heard him – followed by a haunting solo from Leigh. On "Johnny Anaconda", the saxophonist borrows lyrically from Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman"; the closing "Flower Flaps" features the fiercer, more familiar Brötzmann.

Maya Homburger/Barry Guy/Lucas Niggli
Acanthus
Maya CD/DL
String trios are unusual in jazz and improv. Leroy Jenkins's The Revolutionary Ensemble are a rare ancestor of the trio on *Acanthus*, in which violinist Maya Homburger and bassist Barry Guy join percussionist Lucas Niggli. In this collection of mostly short pieces, improvisation and composition are manifested in diverse ways. Miniatures by Hungarian master György Kurtág include *Hommage À JSB*, that references Bach's D minor *Allemande*. Homburger's "Andeutende Dynamik", based on a triptych by Hungarian artist András Wolsky, is through-composed but with improvised episodes. The improvising shows a compelling variety and sense of adventure, especially on the compositions by Barry Guy. The recording was made at an exotic location, The Old Carpet Factory on the Greek island of Hydra.

François Houle & Joe Sorbara
Hush
ezz-thetics CD/DL
A Canadian clarinettist and percussionist pairing that achieves a supernal sympathy. Houle's melodic clarinet playing is reminiscent of Jimmy Giuffre's folksy lyricism, but on other tracks he treats his instrument as a resourceful noise generator. Sorbara's brushes complement Houle's breath-sounds on "Stool Pigeon". "Coded Whisper" is a beautiful Giuffre-like folk blues; "Knocked Ambulations" features haunting clarinet squawks and squeaks, interior piano sounds and ambient crickets. Gamelan-like small instruments inflect the clarinet's fluttering lines on "What Next? (For Ron Gaskin)", while "Montgolfière" is replete with growls, vocalisations and, appropriately, balloon effects, whose origins remain obscure. Master musicians and a dream duo.

Institute For Certified Nomadic Illicit Sonic Practices
Calisthenics
Seminal DL/LP
Berlin based Brazilian musicians Marina Cyrino (flute, amplified piccolo) and Matthias Koole (electric guitar) mix electronic and acoustic sounds, preparations, internal amplification and no-input mixing. Piccolo and flute function as noise-generators and percussion, guitar imitates birdsong. Inspired by *The Handbook Of Calisthenics And Gymnastics: A Complete Drill-Book With Music* by J Watson (1864), the duo offer a lively and immensely resourceful release, without cuts or overdubs. On "Donkey Kick", it's hard to believe the percussive sounds come from flute. On "Inchworm", additional effects are produced by a spring attached to the flute's base, while the guitar is played with a cello bow. The noises on "Burpee" are uncannily reminiscent of a dentist's high-pitched drill; "Duck Walk" is like a grumpy conversation. Droll, luminous and eventful.

Makoto Kawashima/ Harutaka Mochizuki/ Michel Henritzi
Chinmoku Wa Ishikure Ni Yadoru Bouryoku
Trost CD/DL
Japanese alto-saxophonists Harutaka Mochizuki and Makoto Kawashima, with French lapsteel guitarist Michel Henritzi, commemorate the rage and melancholy of the late saxophonist Kaoru Abe (1949–78). The album was recorded in separate locations in 2021. Translating as *The Violent Beauty Of Night Moods*, the title was inspired by Austrian expressionist poet Georg Trakl's doleful *Nachtlied* (*Night Song*). Kawashima and Mochizuki duet together only on the opening and longest track "Taiyo No Maiso" ("Dance Of The Sun"). Across its immense vista, overblown saxophones compete over a haunting feedback-driven dronescape. "Kumo No Hikisaki" ("Clouds") makes for an awesome conclusion.

Zack Lober
NO FILL3R
Zennez/Bandcamp DL/LP
The Canadian bassist's Netherlands based *NO FILL3R* trio feature Suzan Veneman (trumpet) and Sun-Mi Hong (drums). Trumpet trios are rare, and his choice was deliberate and felicitous – Lober cites Tim Hagans's *Audible Architecture* and Charlie Haden/Don Cherry/ Ed Blackwell's *Montreal Tapes* as models. As he explains by email, "I wanted more air and sonic space. Trumpet is way more exposed and more single-line driven – it can't just shred like a sax." The title *NO FILL3R* means, among other things, no chord instruments, no explicit harmonies – all compositions are line-based for two voices – and no comping. "Mid-Music" has a boppish theme and intensely melodic bassline. "Force Majeure", with a loose Latin feel, features lyrical trumpet. The atonal-sounding theme of "Blues" recalls Jimmy Giuffre's 1960s trios, while the drummer's gorgeously spacious midtempo groove is reminiscent of Elvin Jones. The title track is a free improvisation, while "Luck (Alice)" has a catchy, affecting theme and captivating groove. Lober has been a sideman on many recordings over the last 20 years, but this adventurous album is his first as leader. I hope it's the first of many.

Novoa/Kamaguchi/Cleaver Trio
Vol 1
577 CD/DL
Brooklyn based pianist and composer Eva Novoa – here also on Fender Rhodes and Chinese gongs – is joined by longtime collaborator Masa Kamaguchi (bass), and Gerald Cleaver (drums). Novoa was born in Barcelona, and studied jazz there, in New York and the Netherlands. Since 2012 she's recorded eight albums as leader featuring her own music, and she works regularly with saxophonists Daniel Carter and Ingrid Laubrock. A reference point for her work is Paul Bley, with unapologetic use of space, and bold and restless improvising. "Circles In Blue" is denser and more chordal than Bley, while the pointillistic "Rectangles" and the lugubrious "Spheres" are unusual examples of free improv on Fender Rhodes. A deep and thoughtful release.

Noise, Industrial & Beyond by Raymond Cummings

Anthology Of Experimental Music From Latin America
Various
Unexplained Sounds CD/ DL
Italy's Unexplained Sounds label specialises in international experimental compilations. *Anthology Of Experimental Music From Latin America* is among the label's most compelling collections. "Leaving The Body" – from Mexico's Tarme Til Alle – leaves this planet in cascading, shoegaze-y whorls of flammable synthesizer. On "KhipuKoding", Peru's Paola Torres Núñez del Prado shaloms through mirrored, hallucinated chutes. Argentina's Pablo Ribot wraps cracked prisms in cellophane with "Mantra". Paulo Motta of Brazil contributes "Index Dial Maracatu", a vortex of shattering digital crystals and bedazzled rainpool bleep. Spain's Emiliano Hernandez-Santana massages dark seethe and rattling segue into "Islas De Fango", the soundtrack to an imagined cult noir where the nameless city never stops changing colours and all the actors lack faces.

Aaron Dilloway & AMURTARITI
One Night At Flux Box
Bandcamp DL
This charity release for the Kathmandu, Nepal arts venue Flux Box can, at times, suggest the execution of some obscure rite in studio stereo. That's familiar territory for Ohio's Aaron Dilloway, who teams up here with Indonesian instrument builder Anil Sabba in a spooky, whirring flurry of horns, tapes, electronics, junk metal and vocals perverted beyond sanity. To play *One Night At Flux Box* through, for the lay listener, is to both have no earthly clue how it was made and not to care. Maybe it doesn't matter – the results are what counts. Best to just let the high frequency chirp and slurp that is "Cut 14" or the marathon blast furnace echo of "Cut 7" or Sabba's quizzical, squeaking solo showcase wash over you, dissolving space and time as it's commonly perceived. The oddly numbered track-titling – as if these adventures were tree corings! – implies that a sequel is possible, which is no bad thing.

Espinoza/Long Duo
Musical Aliveness
Bandcamp DL
The initial collaboration between Chicago based multi-instrumentalists Xris Espinosa and Norman W Long – 2020's *Espinoza/Long Duo* – felt generously loose, its sprays of altered bells, unruly, weedy reeds and subconscious beats in no hurry, in cold pursuit of a sustained groove or theme. While follow-up *Musical Aliveness* packs more purpose, it could almost be the work of a different if no less freeform pair. On "Part 1", Espinosa's reeds, Long's electronics and their separate percussions are meshed so tightly that they threaten to rupture the whole, clanks, snare hits, off-tune test tones, drumstick clicks and sick drum fills rushing at you in a staunched stream until daft madness stands revealed as bebop method. The relatively straightforward "Part 2" profitably pits opposing currents – looped, glowering textures, stinging cymbals, regal, clouding horns – against one another, reminiscent of enervating collaborations between Four Tet's Kieran Hebden and the late Steve Reid that enlivened the 2000s.

Heavy Cloud
Scree
Brachliegen Tapes DL/MC
Scree is among the denser Heavy Cloud recordings Deal, England's Ryan Hooper has blacksmithed into existence. It is a work of pulsating loops that clash and conflict, a desperate, amorphous cartoon scrawl that's actually several desperate, amorphous cartoon scrawls, guided by an iron compositional will. Scorching guitars brand and sear "The Sun Has Burned These Rocks" into a blinding, five-alarm game of psychedelic bumper cars. On "The Great Continuous Flow Of The Tide Has Crumbled The Boulders", Hooper crimps and cinches his simulated sonic Hades into patterns, rhythms and fusillades arresting enough to slip comfortably into any capable DJ's acid techno set.

mHz
Same Room, Another Day
LINE DL
A Covid-era record born in hotel quarantine should reflect uncertainty, dread and paranoia, right? Yet *Same Room, Another Day* is calming, purely narcotic: 14 five-minute receptacles into which New Zealand's Mo H Zareei pours sweet, fizzy synth drones, stirring or heating or cooling. A staticky shimmy floats at the core of "13-06-21/23-03-00", orbited by stoic, two-chord entreaties. Wafting into being, "07-06-21/17-03-00" warbles and quavers, almost resolving into a melody but not necessarily committed to doing so. Maybe, this album insists, confinement is an illusion or a state of mind – perhaps mood and destiny can be managed and regulated within the sound frames we opt to occupy.

Dave Phillips
Human Nature Denied
Flag Day CD/DL
This visceral recent offering from Zurich's Dave Phillips gazes deep into the voids, existential and societal. What he finds there is not for the faint of heart. The uncategorisable "wrecking the planet and degrading its inhabitants" mimics the predation of some indescribable monster. An intimate, purging dirge, "we are not separate" is locked into a state of eerie, perpetual transmogrification. Terse pianos and pinwheeling effects barely restrain the rage coursing through "this civilization causes sickness"; the applause and idle chatter that greet this track's caterwauls and stage whispers register as rebukes.

Size Matters by Byron Coley

Eric Arn & Margaret Unknown
Visions Of Krychlič
Stoned To Death MC
Document of a fine live set of acoustic guitar improvisations by American ex-pat Eric Arn and Austria's great Margaret Unknown (aka Max Bogner). Both players work equally well with or without song form. In this case their focus almost seems to be more on collisions of string texture than it is on melodic or harmonic pairings. Without having a clue which artist is doing what, the music here initially balances between one of them playing down-stroked barre chords, with the other playing lines manifesting a Loren Connors-esque wobble, interspersed with something closer to Eugene Chadbourne's note-worrying. Later, they move into more complex sonorities based on the artier extensions of American Primitive ideas, putting a bit of a Rob Noyes twist on things.

Ken Brenninger & Bill Nace
Duo
Outlier Communications MC
Brenninger is a guitarist in Philadelphia's cracking Blues Ambush, and Bill Nace is becoming known as the reigning maestro of the electric taishōgoto. This cassette captures an extremely reet duo set the pair played live in Philadelphia last summer, and the blend of shredding and palpitating strings is like the extended climax to a buddy movie starring Keiji Haino and Ethan Miller as dirty cops.

Chris Brokaw
Live At The Decommissioned Power Station In Florli, Norway
12XU MC
This is a solo electric guitar recital by Chris Brokaw of Cambridge, Massachusetts, whose work has ranged from heavy indie rock (Come, Codeine, etc) to a duo with old-time hoot master Geoff Farina to solo acoustic work. His approaches to playing seem able to adapt to 'most any occasion. Here, he offers loud but subtle electric improvs from inside a huge abandoned space in rural Norway. And it's one of my favourites of his many releases. The playing is lovely, with great sustain and a feel (especially on the first side) resembling early Phil Manzanera. The flip has a choppier instrumental edge, and Brokaw finishes up with a lovely ballad. Wish I'd been there.

Crazy Doberman
Devil's Daughter Sings Her Hybrid Poem
No Town 10"
It's been out awhile, but just landed this ace 10" by Virginia's favourite large format freak improv ensemble. 16 players are listed, and there's sax action recalling Doberman's early days with John Olson tooting along with 'em. Hard to actually discern as many individual musicians as are listed, but the rockoid/free jazz hybrid is handled splendidly, and there's a lot of solid pummelling here. There are moments where the blend of percussion, electronics, reeds actually recalls the more spaced musical interludes of the late 1960s Arkestra. A sound for which many reach with less success.

Eater
Outside View
Munster 7"
Stimulators
Loud Fast Rules
Munster 7"
Greater Los Angeles really took the cake for young punk singers with Mad Society's Steve Metz (aged 11) and Unit 3 with Venus (nine years old), but those were not the only little players on the board. From North London, Eater's members were 14–17 when their 1977 debut single came out, and "Outside View" remains a solid xerox punk readymade. The bass run sounds a little funny, but all the pieces are basically in the right places, and the flip sounds as hot. The Stimulators were from New York, existing in the just-pre-hardcore time slot. Their 11 year old drummer Harley Flanagan was already a scenester whose mom was the muse of film maker/polymath Harry Smith. While he went on to form The Cro-Mags (among other atrocities), his single is a nice, rough-fingered punk slapper with a lot more pop content than I'd recalled. Funny how that works. Anyway, it would be cool if young kids started making records again instead of hanging out on their phones. Just one old man's opinion.

Expedient Self
Chairs
Expedient Self MC
Expedient Self is a solo electric guitar project created by Brighton's Simon Chandler. He uses looped figures to create an array of different sounds, which he piles up in ways that resemble Frippertronics NOT ONE WHIT. Even the quieter pieces tend toward dissonance in a way that most such music does not, and the more active passages can be almost antic. Chandler has a great sense of how to assemble discordant elements into a weirdly coherent whole, creating a very heavy ambience that is not *ambient* at all.

The Eye
Breaking The Psychic Mold
Petty Bunco MC
Yet another crazy project by Massachusetts Renaissance man Anthony Pasquarosa (Crystalline Roses, Burnt Envelope, Gluebag, etc). The Eye is a noisy solo 'ensemble' with distorted guitar punching its way through a haze of amp squall and splats of percussion. There are a few vocals tossed in, as casual as those of the Ziggy Stardust band, and the overall effect is not at all unlike that combo's sole LP, except in a few quieter moments.

Family Ravine
Jumpthefox
Round Bale MC
This new offering by Kevin Cahill's Toronto based outfit turns ever leftward. He describes the music as "Nihilist Spasm Band meets The Carter Family" but I think Mother Maybelle's dentures would burst into flame if she heard it. The music has acoustic elements, but they are all fractured, and no traditional elements are audible (at least to me). This is actually closer to the music of improvisational new music ensembles, with percussion, keys and strings (and something else) creating lines inside their own parallel worlds. When they do meet up, the results are more like space prog meets spirit recordings than "Keep On The Sunny Side". I swear!

Golia/Shiroishi/Sikora/Skrowaczewski/Wedman/Zappa
HelMel
Fort Evil Fruit MC
Long, wonderful session for four saxes, piano and percussion. Vinny Golia's reeds have long been a guiding light of the Los Angeles free scene, and this sextet play great. The tracks were recorded by a variety of smaller units as well as 'in bulk', and there's even a solo piece for Catherine Sikora's sax. Some tracks have a mix of layering and individual voicings that reminds me of Anthony Braxton's small groups of the 1970s and 80s, and the way these guys handle space is congruent with post-AACM musical thinking. It's a hep and interesting tape, as well as proof that at least one of Frank Zappa's nephews has solid musical conceptions.

Liam Grant
Run And Get Your Sister
Sound-o-Mat 7"
New Hampshire based guitarist Grant plays music overtly in the tradition of Jack Rose and all those who sailed before him. Like Rose, his sound is equally rooted in folk, blues and proto-country musics, and he also favours the slower pacing many of his peers eschew. Haven't had a chance to see him play live, but the music here is impressive in its stately approach and sure but tricky footing. Nice one.

Max Nordile Hair Clinic
Eating Backwards
Radical Documents MC
Nordile is an Oakland based musician, operating in a lot of odd fields. He primarily plays reeds, found percussion and maybe even cracked electronics, then folds in field recordings. He puts out a lot of tapes – this one is built on messed up recordings overlaid with rather clucky percussing. The results are as befuddling as always, but I mean that in the nicest way possible.

Send cassettes, 7"s, 10"s, etc for possible inclusion in Size Matters to: Byron Coley, PO Box 627, Northampton, MA 01062, US

The Boomerang

New reissues and archive releases

Death
Fate: The Best Of Death
Relapse LP

Florida band Death's final four albums – 1991's *Human* through 1997's *The Sound Of Perseverance* – represent an incredible streak of musical progression, each album an evolutionary leap from the one before it, increasing the degree of compositional complexity, then introducing elements of jazz fusion and finally soaring toward a new paradigm of melodic ecstasy, without ever losing the punishing impact that kept the band anchored within death metal. Indeed, songs like "Scavenger Of Human Sorrow" from *The Sound Of Perseverance* incorporate some of the band's hardest riffs.

That quartet of releases, though, are so highly regarded in some quarters that it's easy to overlook the band's first three records, and that would be a mistake. Their 1987 debut *Scream Bloody Gore*, 1988's *Leprosy* and 1990's *Spiritual Healing* offer equally breathtaking thrills.

This compilation – originally released in 1992 and now reissued on vinyl for Record Store Day – pulls highlights from those initial releases and *Human*, recasting the band's early career in the process. On *Scream Bloody Gore*, Death were a duo, with founder Chuck Schuldiner on guitar, bass and vocals, and Chris Reifert on drums. On *Leprosy* and *Spiritual Healing*, guitarists and drummers cycled in and out, and Terry Butler joined as full-time bassist (though he'd be out by the next album). For *Human*, Schuldiner revamped the entire band, bringing in guitarist Paul Masvidal, bassist Steve DiGiorgio and drummer Sean Reinert.

Given all that fluctuation, it's mind-boggling that all ten of these songs sound like the work of a single creative mind. Schuldiner's brain-scraping riffs, unhinged vocals and squiggly solos were present and recognisable from day one. There's some minor improvement in production from the earliest material to the latest: *Scream Bloody Gore* was crude but ambitious; *Leprosy* was Death at their heaviest, with massive drums; *Spiritual Healing* soared skyward before tumbling back into the inferno – but the compositional brilliance is utterly consistent throughout.

Phil Freeman

Felt
Goldmine Trash
1972 LP
Bubblegum Perfume
1972 LP

Given Lawrence's dogged pursuit of artistic prominence – the mononymous frontman's career plan never involved drifting into obscurity – it would be counterintuitive to ascribe the outsider label to Birmingham's UK indie pop pioneers Felt. But in spite of the reverence they inspired, the band remain somewhat elusive, virtually unknown to the average person on the street. This isn't unusual – many musical heroes reside in the shadow realm between cult acclaim and non-celebrity – but when you consider the gravity of Felt's influence on guitar pop from the 1980s up to the present, it is reasonable to wonder why they aren't etched into public consciousness in the same way as, say, The Smiths or The Fall.

These reissued compilations document Felt's illustrious trajectory from the early Cherry Red years to their Creation epoch, serving as snapshots of each era. Both showcase the unique interplay between Lawrence's casually emotive songwriting and the distinctive musicality of guitarist Maurice Deebank and, latterly, keyboardist Martin Duffy. The highs of *Goldmine Trash* centre on the early records embellished with Deebank's classically trained ornate guitar work, accentuated sublimely on the demo version of "Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow" – stripped of all its glitter and spark, but perfectly punctuated by Lawrence's stoic, half-crooning vocal refrain.

While *Goldmine Trash* charts Felt's evolution from minimalist post-punk to a more lavish pop-orientated sound, *Bubblegum Pop* details the heights attained via the inclusion of Martin Duffy's brash, trembling organ lines. "Ballad Of The Band" for instance is pop perfection, achieved without compromising the group's dreamlike mystique – sensitive and erudite, but never cloying – and leaving their cool credentials firmly intact. Above all else, these records serve as testament to a band well versed in the importance of melody and nuance.

Hayley Scott

Harald Grosskopf
Oceanheart + Oceanheart Revisited
Bureau B 2xCD/2xLP

Although Harald Grosskopf first made his name as a drummer in the West German rock group Wallenstein and later accompanying Manuel Göttsching and Klaus Schulze on canonical kosmische works of the 1970s, his passion eventually shifted to synthesizers. This new allegiance was made clear with the title of his 1980 solo debut *Synthesist*.

The follow-up *Oceanheart* didn't appear until 1986 – a minor lifetime by technology's standards. Recorded largely in the small rehearsal studio of a former factory in West Berlin, the album diverges from the brooding, cosmic melancholia so dominant in Berlin School music, favouring instead a breezy, utopian mood, aptly captured in the original artwork (replaced in subsequent reissues) of a naively drawn heart balancing on wavy piano keys.

Hamburg based archival institution Bureau B reissued *Oceanheart* in 2014, but apparently once was not enough. For this 2023 edition, the label proposed that Grosskopf rework the album's six tracks into a full-length companion collection, included here as *Oceanheart Revisited*. "Eve On The Hill" revamps the Kraftwerkian original into eight minutes of percolating, open horizon techno. "Pondicherry Dream" skews the celestial swirling tablas of the 1986 mix into a glitchy, modal gothic trance. Album closer "Minimal Boogie" tightens its Reichian saloon piano source material into a lockstepped synthetic stomp. Throughout, the second disc is marked by a heavier hand: bassier beats, richer and brighter synths, sharpened EQ, more sculpted distortions.

Taken as a whole, the reworkings are less a buttress to the original than a sliding door to an alternate future, demonstrating that when and with what a song was recorded determines its substance as much as the creator's design. Today's tools of the trade, of course, are inconceivably more precise than Grosskopf's 1986 rig: Tascam eight-track, 12-track mixer, Mini-Moog, Jupiter-6. (*Oceanheart* was even mastered on a Betamax video recorder – considered a cutting edge stereo technique at the time.) *Oceanheart Revisited*, by contrast, was crafted with engineer Tobias Stock at his world class analogue studio On Tape. Means plus time are the equation of art; tweak the variables and the results shift accordingly.

But no matter how exquisite the wiring, technology timestamps itself. The sheen and polish of these pandemic-era reimaginings will inevitably one day sound as quaintly dated as their predecessors' Berlin Wall escapist fantasies.

Britt Brown

Maajun
Vivre La Mort Du Vieux Monde
Souffle Continu CD/DL/LP
François Jeanneau
Une Bien Curieuse Planète
Souffle Continu CD/DL/LP
Siegfried Kessler/Gus Nemeth/Stu Martin
Solaire
Souffle Continu CD/DL/LP

Here are three more reissues of obscure artefacts from France's 1970s counterculture courtesy of Paris record shop and label Souffle Continu.

Experimental rock five-piece Maajun's 1971 debut release *Vivre La Mort Du Vieux Monde* (roughly translating as *Living The Death Of The New World*) is a manic, barrier-breaking concept album that emits a mix of spiked psychedelia, blurred blues, disjointed jazz and freaked out folk – held together with lyrics that

The transgressive queer cabaret of New York's Blacklips Performance Cult is chronicled in a new compilation

By Claire Biddles

Blacklips Bar: Androgyns & Deviants – Industrial Romance For Bruised & Battered Angels 1992–1995
Various
Anthology DL/2xLP

"This is not a popularity contest, we're not trying to get those people to love us," states activist and *The Celluloid Closet* author Vito Russo about the divide between straight/cis society and the queer outsiders of New York. "The nicer you are to them the shittier they treat you. They're still going to hate us, they're still going to be bigots, and there's still gonna be no money for AIDS. So I say disrupt their lives."

Coming part way through *Blacklips Bar: Androgyns & Deviants*, Russo's words nail the tone of this 90 minute retrospective of the New York drag performance group Blacklips Performance Cult. Co-founded in 1992 by dance artist Johanna Constantine, performer Psychotic Eve and singer Anohni, the group assembled every Monday after midnight to dance, sing and perform original plays, which often served as an outlet for the grief and frustration amid the ongoing AIDS crisis. Comprised of archival recordings mixed in with choice club tracks, *Androgyns & Deviants* is an evocative reconstruction of the Pyramid Club, the Downtown spot that underwent a weekly transformation into an anarchic queer utopia.

The authenticity and energy of the compilation comes from its inherent eclecticism, reflecting the mix 'n' match of styles, forms and characters that populate queer (artistic) spaces. Its blend of punk rock fury, tortured dramatics, tragedy and humour is instantly familiar. Downtown legend Joey Arias's torch singer take on the Billie Holiday standard "Good Morning Heartache" squeezes in next to a poem by Tammy Taste Test, followed by Divine's Hi-NRG classic "You Think You're A Man" – an odd trajectory of performers, moods and artforms that wouldn't be unexpected at a queer cabaret night in 2023.

Although it welcomed a rolling cast of performers, Blacklips itself consisted of 15–20 troupe members, all Downtown artists and performers, at any one time. In their performances, the troupe members reference queer iconography and language, and satirise the straights, playing to a knowing audience – and perhaps the odd heterosexual who happened to walk in off the street to have their life unexpectedly disrupted. Here, the outsiders were on the inside. "Suspecting Mrs Shyster" sees Sissy Fitt as Carol TooGood imitate straight anxiety (*"Something's wrong with that family, I just know it! I've got to get to the bottom of this!"*) and "Janet Vampire" by Anohni and Pearls is a mock news report sending up the hunger for sensational gory details that feed hatred of marginalised people.

Of course, any emulation of a queer cabaret would be incomplete without its earnest moments of questionable quality. Troupe member Sissy Fitt's solo guitar and vocals cover of The Rolling Stones' "Sister Morphine" feels like little more than a cue to go out for a cigarette. Better is Ebony Jet's molasses-slow take on Lou Reed's "Satellite Of Love", which adds a little knowing melodrama to its on the nose song selection and stripped down piano accompaniment.

Among the archival material, the studio recordings on the compilation – credited here as "DJ tracks" – are also hugely varied, but share a confrontational attitude. From Hi-NRG call and response (Meng & Ecker's "Shoot Yer Load") and goth (Christian Death's "Stairs – Uncertain Journey") to new wave (Marilyn & The Movie Stars' "So Disgraceful") and the closest Diamanda Galás got to a dancefloor hit ("Double-Barrel Prayer"), there's a sense of transgression even within outsider genres. In an entirely complimentary sense, these tracks are the least palatable examples of their genres recorded by the least palatable performers. Like Blacklips at large – and all good queer cabaret art – they offer sly but aggressive disruptions of familiarity.

Founding member Anohni found her first outlet as a musician within Blacklips, and a selection of her earliest recordings are collected here, under her performance guises Fiona Blue, Precious Liar and Justin Grey. Taking on the twisted voice of Precious Liar, she performs a vaudevillian theme for the troupe, plainly acknowledging the role of art in the AIDS crisis (*"Blacklips/Because we're living on borrowed time/It happened to a friend of mine"*). As Fiona Blue, she performs an early version of "Rapture" which is both more theatrical and, with its organ-emulating synths, more befitting of its spiritual theme than the later version on Antony & The Johnsons' 2000 debut album.

Her take on Ketty Lester's "Love Letters" is even more moving for the way it sounds like it was recorded on a dictaphone from the next room. The scrappy presentation only enhances the devotional magic of her performance, calling to mind the quintessential queer experience of finding rapture in dirty, overlooked places. ○

Pearls aka Alex Perlof, 1990s

Marti Wilkerson

evoke the surrealistic prose of Lautréamont and the rebellious poetry of Rimbaud.

All of which comes to a head on the extended "La Longue Marche", where a concoction of various styles (including barbed, stereotypical references to their homeland's traditional musical culture) is stirred up and poured out. Echoes of The Fugs and early Mothers Of Invention can be distinctly heard in the shadows of the song, before it eventually collapses into the kind of free jamming that was a recurring vice for European rock groups from this period. Elsewhere, "Passage Clouté", which features tabla, sitar and stringed instruments gently cascading over a softened vocal, creates a genuinely unique finale to what must have seemed a daring and exploratory project at the time.

Recorded for jazz pianist Jef Gilson's Palm label in 1975, seasoned saxophonist/flautist/composer François Jeanneau's debut solo album features him at the centre of an accomplished and lively workout with a group that includes bass player JF Jenny-Clark, drummer Bernard Lubat and Michael Grailler on keyboards and synthesizer – the latter instrument being responsible for the space age effects that occasionally bubble to the surface. For the most part, however, Jeanneau's interplanetarily titled musical journey is more of an homage to John Coltrane than Sun Ra, as can be heard on the salutory "Mr JC For Ever" where, all gimmickry left behind, his tenor playing really takes off. The set's title track is equally satisfying, a sprightly jazz ramble led by Jeanneau's flute and further fleshed with Grailler's comforting piano rotations and synthesized birdsong.

Originally released on Futura in 1971, jazz pianist and flautist Siegfried Kessler's *Solaire* is, despite the absence of synthesizers, more experimental in its scope – allowing elements of Cecil Taylor and Thelonious Monk to take control alongside his own somewhat mathematical playing style. Kenner is ably joined by bass player Gus Nemeth and notable UK drummer Stu Martin, both of whom provide the necessary tightly balled energy to accompany their leader's occasionally erratic keyboard excursions. Martin makes his own mark here on the self-explanatory "Drum", a brief but exhilarating exhibition of his skill where every creative entry point of his kit is explored.

The trio's true strengths, however, shine through on "Solaire", where Kenner's vibrant piano flares light up the composition as Martin and Nemeth pour down smouldering showers of rhythmic rain.

Edwin Pouncey

The Muffins
Baker's Dozen
Cuneiform 12xCD+DVD

The Muffins are the most important prog band the US has produced. While never particularly successful in commercial terms, their musical evolution and effect on America's musical underground scene parallels and is comparable to both The Soft Machine and Henry Cow. Based in the Washington DC area, The Muffins' line-up took a while to stabilise, and there is a decade-plus gap in their timeline, but the high quality of the music documented by these CDs (plus accompanying 76 page booklet) should make my contention feasible to anyone with ears.

The Muffins' first period ran from 1973 to 1981. After toying with reunion shows throughout the early 1990s, they reformed in 1998 and played somewhat regularly until 2015. As fine as their later music was, I am happy the box focuses more heavily on the earlier iteration, emphasising work from when they were more randomly experimental, and had the time to rehearse and perform constantly.

Their protean material is a mash of influences – early Mothers, Soft Machine and their Canterbury followers, plus avant jazz outfits like The Art Ensemble Of Chicago and Sun Ra's Arkestra – intellectual hippie music of the highest order. The line-up ranges from trio to quintet as they start to explore areas such as Italian prog, harder space rock tropes and increasingly complex time signatures. In late 1976 they settled on a quartet formulation comprised of David Newhouse (keyboards and saxophone), Billy Swann (bass), Thomas Scott (sax) and Paul Sears (drums). This is the band as it existed on record.

The first four discs document The Muffins' pre-LP days. That stuff is scruffy, funny, loose and rapidly evolving in various directions. The second four discs document their mature growth, as was displayed on their first two LPs, as well as their backing work on Fred Frith's *Gravity* LP. Their sound gets harder and choppier, integrating ideas from Rock In Opposition bands like Etron Fou Leloublan, culminating in their Frith-produced *185* LP. After which they called it a day.

When they returned in the 90s, the sound was more overtly jazzoid, somewhat in the vein of post-*Six* Soft Machine. They also picked up harsher edges from America's post-fusion free jazz players. But they always managed to bend things back into an essentially rockist framework, very much in the Canterbury tradition. This is tricky turf – so close to florid pomp, it's difficult for any band to keep from keeling over into the Emersonian brambles. But The Muffins pull it off consistently, and sound amazingly solid from first note to last.

Great band, great music, great stories about the hippie house that birthed them, the punk fanzine guy (Mike Heath) who worked for them, and much else. A fantastic effort in all regards.

Byron Coley

Phauss
Audiodrome
Room 40 CD/DL
NYA Sverige – Nothing But The Truth
Room 40 CD/DL

Room40 release a pair of archive recordings from Phauss, the collaboration between Swedish musicians Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Erik Pauser.

The first is *NYA Sverige – Nothing But The Truth*, a piece constructed from recordings made during their 1991 tour of the USA alongside Zbigniew Karkowski and The Hafler Trio. These performances were wild and would often see fire rising from the stage as the pair conducted strange combative rituals in showers of sparks.

Watching videos of those performances now, streaked with old VHS fuzz and wobble, they register more like the abstruse beginning of some snuff film. However, in spite of the brutal heat generated by their physical performance, there remains a chilly counterweight in the sound itself, a low and tundral churn keeping everything in balance.

Audiodrome features two longform collages of found sounds. While travelling through various cities and countries, von Hausswolff and Pauser set up an alarm that would sound every few days, prompting them to begin recording in random locations and situations. On "Zürich – Zürich 1986" this results in an exhilarating vibrancy; conversations loom towards the ear and then lope away, dopplering like the sirens of vehicles which also rumble by. Classical music bleeds from some obscure source, its precise pomp and bluster matched by rattle and clang from cafes and kitchens.

"Alger – Lagos 1983" conjures a terrain which is less hectic, the recording drifting along rather than being jostled by the hustle and bustle. What registers more than anything is a sense of proximity – the squeal of traffic wrestles with snippets of street performers and the chatter of city dwellers passing through the mixture, creating a soundscape that feels up close and urgent.

Methodologies such as these do not always result in something worth listening to – sure, record the inside of abandoned 1970s laundrettes mid-demolition, or whatever the sensational conceit may be, but what's the point if it sounds completely boring? However the pieces here are consistently engaging. The processes and rituals are all but forgotten, because the recordings themselves are aggressively alive, crackling with a startling immediacy.

Spenser Tomson

Phew
Our Likeness
Mute CD/DL/LP

After many years out of print, here is a welcome repress of the third solo album by Japanese underground legend (and recent *Wire* cover star) Phew. Originally issued in 1992, *Our Likeness* came more than ten years after the breakup of her post-punk group Aunt Sally and the release of her self-titled debut. Fittingly, it sounds like a tour through musical ideas and tastes accumulated over a decade.

Like her first album, *Our Likeness* was recorded at Conny Plank's studio in Germany. Stylistically varied, it jumps from reflective guitar expressions to rock bombast to minimal sound collage. Phew's collaborators included Can's Jaki Liebezeit, Einstürzende Neubauten's Alexander Hacke, and former DAF/Liaisons Dangereuses maestro Chrislo Haas: a formidable line-up, and exemplary of her strong connections with the German avant garde. This musical kinship is teased out by Liebezeit's distinct drumming style and in the unwinding forms of tracks like "Glitter Of Night" and "Our Element" – the latter including a mid-song breakdown which points towards the strategies and sounds of Phew's later solo electronic work. The unpredictable

structure and the combination of found/treated sounds on "Smell" are also prescient.

The weaving guitars of "Our Likeness" are reminiscent of The Durutti Column while the expansive "Spring" sounds like a darker version of late Talk Talk. Phew adopts a gothic mode for the closing ballad "Ocean", sing-speaking over a dramatic parade of reverbing guitars, death march drums and what sounds like a distant car crash. One can imagine it being effectively repurposed by David Lynch.

"Depth Of The Forehead" is a strange hard rock track that sounds like it's slowly melting at the edges. This heaviness is also present on "Being" which juxtaposes pastoral sounds with metal guitars in the starkest example of the gleeful genre-hopping that Phew was enjoying at the time. The only real clue to the album's era of origin is the distinctly 1990s guitar sound on "Expression" – perhaps also the only song here that has dated poorly.

Cohesion isn't expected or necessarily desired from such a wide-ranging album, but there's something alchemical about the way all its disparate elements are connected. It's also all presided over by the voice of Phew, switching modes to match the environments in compelling narration.

Claire Biddles

Andrew Poppy
Ark Hive Of A Live
False Walls 4xCD+Pbk/DL

The composer has kindly provided us with the perfect tag. Andrew Poppy maintains that *Ark Hive Of A Live* more closely resembles John Cage's *Roaratorio* than it does Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, though the very fact he has mentioned both allows us to find common characteristics. The animating spirit is Poppy's protean musical imagination, as light as wings beating one moment, thunderous and dark the next. He has long resembled the sorcerer's apprentice of contemporary music, setting in motion wave after wave of dancing figures that threaten to overrun our ability to process them; these days, of course, he's the sorcerer as well, able to calm the chaos with a flick of the finger. And with that glorious hair, he looks like a mage too.

The Joycean spirit – *Roaratorio* was a sonic realisation of *Finnegans Wake* – is evident in the wordplay of the title. For this is a buzzing "Ark Hive", older pieces saved two by two from the flood all the other apprentices have set in motion. It's not just an archive, compilation or best of. It is the record "Of A Live", following the trajectory of Poppy's composing life from his Lost Jockey days to the present, but in the form of otherwise unreleased works caught in live performance and gently transformed in the editing suite into the components of four well-shaped albums.

The themes are set out clearly enough. *Volume One* is mostly orchestra plus soloist; *Two* is vocal pieces; *Three* is music written for independent ensembles; *Four* explores the electroacoustic borderlands. "Attempt At An Ecstatic Moment", with its rising Mahlerian horn figure, is a perfect early example of how Poppy frames his music with self-dissolving irony, for there's nothing of the attempt, essay or esquisse about it. The ecstatic moment is delivered, confirming a composer who clearly spent his early years listening to the *Resurrection Symphony* and *The Rite Of Spring* as much as he did to Cream doing "Sittin' On Top Of The World".

Blues, jazz, classical, minimalism are all tightly bunched in the work, but neither eclectically nor amateurishly. The polish of Poppy's music has always been its most impressive feature. "This Language Buys Ice Cream", one of the vocal pieces, finds a place between German art song, cabaret music and later Talk Talk. And you can keep on finding such accidental hybrids, or more accurately a whole new island fauna, for Poppy's music is like Madagascar – you discover species there you don't find anywhere else.

Finnegans Wake is a decent model for this astonishingly lively archive, but *Ulysses* is probably better. One man's life, compressed into a day full of siren songs, argumentative encounters and a throbbingly erotic subtext.

Brian Morton

Unwound
Unwound
Numero Group DL/LP

The glowing reputation enjoyed by Olympia, Washington outfit Unwound is both well-deserved and a miracle. In the 1990s, they were simply *around* – one of several American bands surfing the post-hardcore wave. Their presence was less about being better than everyone else, and more about contributing to a DIY community skeptical of mainstream politics and culture. Unwound toured incessantly, especially on the West Coast, and going to shows felt like hanging out at your friend's house. Yet the group's implosion in 2001, months after releasing their masterwork *Leaves Turned Inside You*, as well as bassist Vern Rumsey's death in 2020, forced everyone to reckon with the loss of an exceptionally talented band who clearly stood out from their peers, even if fans had been hesitant to acknowledge that.

Numero Group has been reissuing Unwound's catalogue since the 2013 box set *Kid Is Gone*. A fresh edition of their 1995 self-titled album arrives as surviving members Justin Trosper and Sara Lund have announced a new tour for all the emo and screamo kids who didn't see them the first time around. Out of the band's seven albums, *Unwound* is arguably the oddest duck. It was recorded before their official 1993 debut *Fake Train*, but didn't see release until 1995, well after lead songwriter Trosper had begun to refine his ideas through increasingly strong efforts like 1994's *New Plastic Ideas* and 1995's *The Future Of What*. More importantly, it doesn't feature Lund, whose metronomic rhythm was key to the band's evolution; Brandt Sandeno served as drummer before Lund replaced him on *Fake Train* (he later returned as a contributor to *Leaves Turn Inside You*).

As a result, *Unwound* has long had an odds and sods reputation. In contrast to the clear, wry enunciation Trosper deployed on later gems like "Unauthorized Autobiography", he toggles between mopey talk-singing and declamatory screams, and his tentative approach often holds back the dynamic arrangements of songs like "Antifreeze". Still, his alienation on "Fingertips" is palpable. Trosper, Rumsey and Sandeno craft tangled, mathematical arrangements boiling over with feedback, leading to head-banging churners like "Kid Is Gone".

"I can't give you everything I want/I can't even look at you", Trosper sings on "Stuck In The Middle Of Nowhere Again", reflecting an era defined by bruised honesty and pained hearts.

Mosi Reeves

Print Run

New music books and publications

A Is For Anarchist: An ABC Book For Activists
billy woods & M Musgrove
Universe Hbk 48 pp

If you approached the average billy woods fan and told them that the New York rapper had written a book, I doubt there would be much surprise. The depth and expanse of woods's lyricism suggests that he has got at least one book in him. Instead, the surprise might come from the fact that he decided to write a children's book. In 2022, I reviewed UK hiphop artist Lee Scott's *Swan Songs* [*The Wire* 456], in which I labelled him as the first rapper to debut with a fiction novel. Well, this time round, I think I'm right in saying that billy woods is the first rapper to debut with a children's book.

As surprises go, this one makes a lot more sense when you get to grips with the book itself. The son of a Zimbabwean revolutionary and a Jamaican intellectual, woods wanted to write something cool to read to his children, and what could be cooler than a comically cynical and subversive take on the more conventional ABC format? It's a method that manages to repackage the same energy that populates woods's music onto a platform for a less mature audience, but without any hint of condescension.

From the outset, *A Is For Anarchist* conveys what are still considered radical notions (but shouldn't be), in a much more digestible form for younger readers. The titular anarchist is described as someone who doesn't like rules, or being told what to do, before pointing out that you, the reader, are already an anarchist. Match this up with M Musgrove's illustration of a monarch's legs poking out of a bonfire and you have the recipe for a delightfully entertaining book that should bring as much joy to any adult playing the role of narrator, as it will to the children themselves.

M Musgrove is the perfect partner for woods on this adventure, having previously collaborated with him on various projects, including an award-winning music video for "Stonefruit" by Armand Hammer and The Alchemist, and some artwork for woods's solo album *Hiding Places*. Her illustrations are easily adjustable to the needs of this literary world, their whimsical nature making them the perfect counterpart to the definitions put forward in woods's prose. Two parts amusement to one part abstraction, Musgrove's drawings further capture the reader's fascination.

If a lot of the letters in *A Is For Anarchist* follow along the same direct lines as the title – C is for communism, F is for fascism, and so on – there are also more subtle moments. W explains that walls are all around us, then asks if they are made "to keep people out or to trap us inside"; and elsewhere K defines knees as things that help us run, jump or stand up, for example if you need to stand up to a racist police state. Rap music gets a mention too, thanks to I, standing for Nas's *Illmatic*, aka "the best rap album of all time".

All in all, I couldn't think of a better plan and execution for a contemporary children's book. It is certainly the kind of book I wish I had been exposed to as a child, and it will be one I share with my own son in a few years' time.

Tim Fish

A Licence To Rock And Pop: An Inventory Of Attitude
James Fry
Slimvolume Pbk 272 pp

This step by step guide to how to be a rock 'n' roll cliche is not so much a manifesto as a child's first primer, offering illustrated chapters including "How To Swear", "Do You Like My New Hair?" and "Yes, Smoking". At the back of the book is an exhaustive 18 page form, featuring knowingly invasive questions on the reader's recent experience of sex, witchcraft and terrorism. Submitting this to the publisher will result in the licence of the title being issued or withheld.

The body of the book is self-consciously modelled after Marshall McLuhan's mosaic books (most obviously, *The Medium Is The Massage*) and tonal tactics follow the textual. McLuhan promoted amusement over anger, escapism via alienation. Which is presumably why every point here feels so blanketed in irony that it's hard to know if Fry cares, or indeed whether we're supposed to. But, where McLuhan's illuminated texts are designed to be opened at random and microdosed, Fry explicitly demands we consume all of his in "their natural order". Of course, the meta-game here is surely that no one with any attitude would follow such instructions – any who do will fail the test. A decent joke, if so.

After laying the book down, I've found I do care. I ask myself why the advice – however tongue in cheek – seems to belong to another pre-internet world. I've wondered how iconic images of old school rock attitude have informed BIMM seminars on Stadium Stage Presence or the hyper-styling of state-sponsored K-Pop. I've tried to imagine whether there's an audience for such widescreen postures, when even *The X-Factor* (built around 'star quality') lies in pixellated ruins.

The fact is, today's Alexanders, Alexandras (and maybe even Alexas, if we're dragging vocaloids into it) weep because they have no more mainstream to conquer. A shared, top-down culture didn't entirely capsize so much as list sidewise – pluggers and chroniclers alike eclipsed by algorithms endlessly injecting eerily accurate playlists (new and old) into our taste bubbles.

And, in a multi-dimensional world – where a Schrödinger's cam model can be both famous and utterly obscure at once – the kind of bombast perfected for big stages is pure cultural cringe. Today's exciting technologies – from generative software to prescription meds to queer theory – swerve aspirations to imperial fame precisely because the centre didn't hold. Likewise, all listeners and fans are floaters, without the sunk-cost loyalty of album ownership.

It takes an industry to raise a star, and music – out-competed by gaming – is ever more DIY. Seizing the means of (micro) production has helped many musicians, though being their own manager, PR, (bedroom) producer, etc, also diffuses their identity, making most of them (rightly!) more spectral than spectacular. And, in creating inner spaces where fans become patrons, where feedback becomes synthesis, artists turn thrillingly inside out – streaming knowledge via 'making of' documents, giving lessons, listening back. Fantastical memes cum biomes result.

Ultimately, micro-expressions mix better than propagandist posturing. Attitude was always armour; intimacy is where things really happen. If there's hope for rock and pop, it's in the wormholes – where light from dead stars is not required.

Neil Noon

Going Out: Walking, Listening, Soundmaking
Elena Biserna (Editor)
Q-02 Pbk 580 pp

At 11am on Saturday 16 May 1970, The Scratch Orchestra disrupted Richmond High Street in West London. Following scores composed by members Judith Euren and Psi Ellison, the group set out to break the "claustrophobic spell of capitalist normalcy". To that end, a diverse array of tactics were employed. "Either shout or whisper in conversation", ran one set of instructions. "As a group stand and stare in a shop window – humm automatically."

At one point, the group held hands in a long chain across the length of a shop floor in order to "sever Marks And Spencer's". A balloon popping in the middle of another department store succeeded in producing "imbalance" in a branch of Dickins & Jones. It was, in orchestra member Stefan Szczelkun's recollection, "quite harmless but unbelievably dramatic in its effect". The group made a quick exit, heading up the Vineyard Passage and on, following an itinerary which took this movable concert from Richmond Park to Kew Gardens via the River Thames.

Walking, by May 1970, was already a fairly established part of artistic practice. In 1921, André Breton had led a Dada Excursion through the Latin Quarter of Paris, offering nonsense commentary along the way in a parody of the city tourist guide. In the early 1960s, Fluxus artists Benjamin Patterson, Yoko Ono and Dick Higgins had all composed instructional pieces for walkers, albeit not always strictly practical or even possible. Later in the decade, land artist Richard Long had trampled a straight line through a meadow,

Two new histories of minimalism give voice to a movement that reaches far beyond its 'Big Four' composers

By Louise Gray

On Minimalism: Documenting A Musical Movement
Kerry O'Brien & William Robin (Editors)
University Of California Press Pbk 470 pp
The Names Of Minimalism: Authorship, Art Music, And Historiography In Dispute
Patrick Nickleson
University Of Michigan Press Hbk/Pbk 266 pp

Joan La Barbara (far left) with The Philip Glass Ensemble, 1975

It is time to rethink menimalism, to use Natalie Sharpe's memorable phrase, as later weaponised by Jennifer Lucy Allan. At the very start of this ground-breaking book, editors Kerry O'Brien and William Robin make one thing very clear: that theirs is a revisionist history of minimalism, supported by source documents. Sometimes these are reviews and contemporaneous interviews, sometimes technical details of tuning systems, at other times, "seemingly hallucinogenic rants".

On Minimalism is a gust of fresh air blowing across a stage thought by critics and canon-makers to be the preserve of Terry Riley, Philip Glass, Steve Reich and La Monte Young. It's taken nearly 60 years to get to this point, if one takes Riley's *In C* (1964) as a cornerstone – which it is, just not the only one. Ranging from Satie, John Coltrane, Pandit Pran Nath and the living traditions of Hindustani music and West African drumming to the present day, O'Brien and Robin marshal a dizzying, dazzling roster to argue persuasively that minimalism, as it's generally understood, is a dynamic methodology that belongs to far more than an East Coast Downtown at a particular point in history.

In fact, it stretches beyond music, as testified by the presence of Meredith Monk, Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer, and the sculptural sonic inventions of Ellen Fullman and Maryanne Amacher. As Joan La Barbara writes in her excellent introduction, minimalism was not a "movement", but rather a constellation of creative drive "as performers moved from band to band, sharing ideas". This elegant definition opens the idea of what minimalism was and yet might be, seeing both its antecedents and its futures.

As a compilation of source texts, *On Minimalism* is unparalleled, containing prescient, critical writings from many commentators and participants – Michael Nyman, Jill Phillips, Tom Johnson (all of whom may have coined the minimalist/-ism term in the late 1960s), but also Pauline Oliveros, Éliane Radigue, Alice Coltrane, Julius Eastman and Amiri Baraka. Organised in 21 accessible chunks (not only the expected ones, but also others covering spirituality, multimedia and altered states), each headed by an introduction that synthesises the coming information, this is a breeze to navigate and, for all its scholarly chops, relaxed in its learning. (Jon Hassell's memories of hashish cocktails in Young's Dream House, recounted in a 2002 interview with Marcus Boon, are a hoot.) Many of the artists feature in multiple categories, which is as it should be: there is a laudable disinclination to simplify here. Listening suggestions abound and the editors give credit where it's due: David Toop's 2021 mixtape for a Black minimalism (originally compiled for his 2018 feature in *The Wire* 414) cannot be bettered.

La Barbara's presence at the front of this book is a timely reminder that, as an extended vocalist/composer she was an integral performer in many of minimalism's major works. She was not only a member of both Reich and Glass's ensembles, seeing works such as the former's *Drumming* and the latter's *Einstein On The Beach* in the process of their formation, but also an active participant in their process. For many reasons, history likes tidiness: this person composed x, that person composed y. La Barbara, alongside O'Brien and Robin's own commentaries, reminds us that the contemporary sharing of ideas was key to the development of what we understand now as minimalism and all its offshoots, be they compositional or multimedia. In telling the story of "how minimalism became minimalism", O'Brien and Robin literally redefine the field through their decentred approach.

The question of authorship (raised subtly by La Barbara above) is rendered overt in Patrick Nickleson's book. *The Names Of Minimalism* (available in usual formats and also on open access) opens with Tony Conrad picketing a La Monte Young concert in the 1990s: the intersection between authorship and ownership was a long-running argument between Young on the one hand, and his former Theatre Of Eternal Music comrades Conrad and John Cale on the other.

As befits a book that is drawn from a PhD thesis, Nickleson seeks to apply philosophical systems to what unfolds – despite his antipathy to theory as a structure of abstractions, difficult to apply in a messy real world. In this case, it's the work of Jacques Rancière and the "poetics of knowledge" – an examination of how discourse and repeated commentary seeks to establish itself as irrefutable science. In fact, Nickleson's title is a nod towards Rancière's *The Names Of History*. The dialectical discussion is enlivened no end by entertaining anecdotes about spiky relations between what Nickleson terms the "Big Four" composers: for all the free-flowing idea-sharing that flows through O'Brien and Robin's book, there's a lot of grumbling and grudging about who did what first and when.

Where *On Minimalism* is wide-ranging, Nickleson's subject matter is confined to an indicative group of composers: the idea is to take these arguments about ownership and more and apply them to many other cases. "Perhaps minimalism, imagined as an 'art music', is little more than the discursive alibi through which white, radical authorship and its privileges can be maintained as a historical property explicitly in its appropriations of Black musical legacies," he writes early on. In so doing, he provides a methodological toolkit that, in a different way to *On Minimalism* but to similar effect, seeks a poetic justice that will enrich our engagement with these musics. ○

Courtesy MoMA PS1 Archives/MoMA New York

and photographed and exhibited the results under the title *A Line Made By Walking*. Adrian Piper had successfully "compress[ed] time and space" by walking around a single New York City block (between 13th and 14th Street and Fifth and Sixth Avenue), recording two hours of "undifferentiated noise" while traversing the block's outer pavement and then playing it back at double speed while walking the inner pavement. Yet, despite Saint Augustine's definition of music as bene modulandi (moving well), the act of walking remains underappreciated as a form of music.

But as the anthropologist Tim Ingold's essay here asserts, walking is inseparable from its own "characteristic rhythmic alternation". Every promenade is at once performance and score. It has texture and pulse, cleaving a path through sound even as sound cleaves through us. In short, as Ingold puts it, "sound walks, just as you do".

In the years following Scratch Orchestra's intervention in London, participants in Vancouver's World Soundscape Project came to define the soundwalk (in Hildegard Westerkamp's formulation) as "any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment". Along with related terms (like soundmark and soundscape), the coinage has proven influential. Flicking through the book we find soundwalks by Andra McCartney, Jacek Smolicki, Ultra-red, Edyta Jarząb, Amanda Gutiérre and Christine Sun Kim. But as researcher Charles Eppley notes, Kim's 2016 work (*LISTEN*), intended for both hearing and deaf participants, presents a critique of "modes of soundwalking that perpetuate oppressive systems of power, especially those that naturalise and normalise hearing and/or environments as neutral spaces of perception and consumption".

Ingold also takes World Soundscape Project's terminology to task, finding it too aloof from its environment. "The chorus is not already laid out," he writes, "it is ever-unfolding... The shapes of sound... can only be made out. And in making them, we make out ourselves as well." Following Ingold, Elena Biserna's research makes a compelling case for walking as a "relational practice". Walking, she writes, establishes both "a radical departure from the spaces and practices specific to art" and "a symbiotic relationship between work and everyday space". Or in David Helbich's terms, it can make a piece less "piece-ish", allowing the work to "retreat into the background", perhaps even "be forgotten", but crucially to "leave one changed" nonetheless.

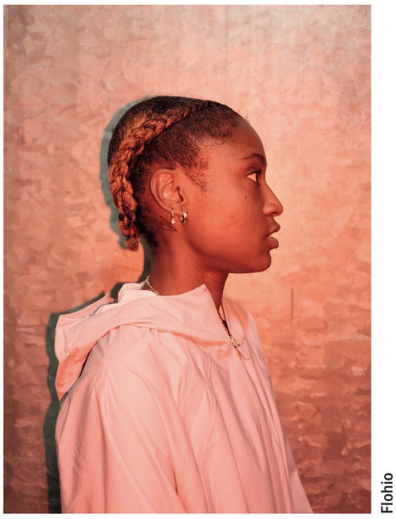
Robert Barry

I Feel Everything You Say, I Feel Everything You Hear

Jan Lankisch (Editor)

Strzelecki Hbk 166 pp

This handsomely presented volume is collated to celebrate ten years of the Cologne based festival Week-End, whose idiosyncratic line-ups are a snapshot of its curators' favourite artists year on year. To reflect this ethos of personal fandom, over 20 artists who have performed at the festival have been invited to recall a moment, a musician or a place that has shaped their own taste and artistry – aiming to collectively form "the building blocks of a new or different oral history of recent music".



Flohio

The chosen subjects are appropriately varied. Sound artist Pak Yan Lau and rapper Flohio talk about cities integral to their work (Brussels and London respectively) and Stephen Pastel writes evocatively about Glasgow ("We've tried to reflect the city in our sound, the sense of moving between sandstone tenements"). Hans-Joachim Roedelius discusses West Berlin's Zodiak Free Arts Lab, and Claire Rousay talks about San Antonio's The Lonesome Rose, beloved for idiosyncratic music programming varying from country to experimental.

The book's title comes from Can's "I'm So Green", aptly reflected in Stephen Malkmus's recollection of his performance of its parent album *Ege Bamyasi* at a 2012 festival: "My kids were carefree and crushing some of the greatest play structures known to man in Berlin." A real highlight is Eiko Ishibashi on composer Jack Nitzsche – an enigmatic reflection of an enigmatic musical persona: "I just love his music, which seems to be telling you something, but actually tells you nothing at all, like coarse sand that falls between your fingers, full of resignation and defeat."

Some discuss musical mentors and collaborators. Suzanne Ciani confesses to developing a friendship with Don Buchla by way of coveting one of his synths, and Jan St Werner of Mouse On Mars shares some typically funny anecdotes about working with Mark E Smith on the 2007 Von Südenfed album ("Mark's workday routine was special. It was almost as if he was unionised"). Engineer and producer Scientist recalls being dub master King Tubby's protégé, and the bittersweet feeling of seeing his techniques popularised after his death: "It would be like the guy who made the first aeroplane, if he woke up out of his grave now and saw what these guys do here with the aeroplanes, he would be laughing his ass off."

Entries such as Ishibashi's are more like written essays, whereas others seem to be direct transcriptions of speech. This works for some contributors, like Flohio, whose vocal cadence contributes to the feel of the words. But with others, such as Marshall Allen, the lack of editing distractingly scatters profound statements amid filler speech.

In one of the longest entries, Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil addresses his lifelong friendship and musical kinship with composer Caetano Veloso, but as someone not so familiar with either's work I craved more contextualisation. Indeed, given how its featured artists come from all corners of the underground, surely nobody reading this book can be fully familiar with all the subjects covered in their short contributions. *I Feel Everything You Say, I Feel Everything You Hear* is more effective as a companion to its parent festival than a standalone volume.

Claire Biddles

Improvision: Orphic Art In The Age Of Jazz

Simon Shaw-Miller

Bloomsbury Hbk 336 pp

Improvision – it's not a typo. For author Simon Shaw-Miller, the term captures the connections between improvisation and visual art. Central to early 20th century abstract art was Walter Pater's dictum that visual art aspires to the condition of music. For most writers, the music in question is Western art music – classical music. But Shaw-Miller makes the case that the most important parallel is with jazz. Arguing that jazz and abstract art share creative techniques of rhythm and improvisation, his book offers a novel interpretation of improvisation as aesthetic principle and artistic practice.

What does it mean for art to aspire to the condition of music? The essential idea is that music is the most abstract of the arts – and that painting should be abstract too, rather than depict objects or even represent a three-dimensional space. The book's subtitle *Orphic Art In The Age Of Jazz* refers to a post-cubist art movement tending towards abstraction. The term Orphism was coined in 1912–13 by French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire, after the mythical poet and musician Orpheus.

Apollinaire was referring to a movement that bridged the gap between cubism and pure abstraction, in particular the work of Robert and Sonia Delaunay. He believed that making painting aspire to the condition of music was vital to this development. Shaw-Miller defines the Orphic tendency in early abstract painting more generally, covering figures such as Duchamp, Picabia, Kupka and Kandinsky.

He cites novelist and critic Ralph Ellison, who in his 1964 collection of essays *Shadow And Act* aligned jazz, improvisation and visual art. For Ellison, jazz has an internal contradiction – it's an art of individual assertion within and against the group. I agree that this is true of some jazz, but many improvisors draw sympathetically from each other. Lee Konitz and Dick Katz, for instance, in a trio version of "Weaver Of Dreams" from 1975, almost complete each other's phrases.

I'd also take issue with Shaw-Miller's assumption that most musical cultures have improvisation. I'm not sure that the term has application before the 18th century composer/performer divide in Western art music – when the composer became a desk worker who produced scores. Only then can we talk about an opposition between improvisation and composition. Finally, I'd question the

Niclas Weber

assumption underlying Orphism – like all art, music is abstract in conception, but it's very concrete in performance.

Improvision is a wide-ranging book, opinionated in the best sense and covering many bases. It's dense with material and argument, often suggestive and not always an easy read. It has thoughtful things to say about Duchamp and readymades, painter Norman Lewis and Miles Davis's *Kind Of Blue*, Busoni's *Sketch Of A New Aesthetic Of Music*, and the dialogue between Derrida and Ornette Coleman. The book is a valuable attempt to bring together writing on music and visual art, which specialisation has kept separate.

Andy Hamilton

Sound American No 29: The Roscoe Mitchell Issue

Nate Wooley (Editor)

Sound American Pbk 135 pp

Roscoe Mitchell's CV is by turns inspiring and daunting. The massively influential multi-instrumentalist/composer was a co-founder of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago, both prime movers in the avant garde scene since essentially putting their city on the contemporary jazz map in the mid-1960s. Mitchell has taught extensively throughout his life, and served as the Darius Milhaud Chair of Composition at Mills College for more than a decade. He has been one of the great pioneers of composition and improvisation for unaccompanied solo instrument. And he has stubbornly maintained a work, practice and teaching schedule that would have exhausted many musicians half his age.

Mitchell and The Art Ensemble were innovators in nearly every way imaginable, from their interest in sound as such (the title of Mitchell's first solo LP, 1966's *Sound*, left no doubt about that) to their novel use of 'little instruments' and found objects such as harmonica, hand percussion, bicycle bells and car horns in performance. The group, partly through the deep familiarity that came with years of collaboration, pushed the practice of cooperative improvisation to new limits. Early on, they lived by what was then an unusual collective model, splitting all of their earnings equally and pouring the money back into the group. And The Art Ensemble and AACM were fellow travellers in the historically huge Black Arts Movement of the 60s.

The current issue of the journal *Sound American*, edited by trumpeter Nate Wooley and devoted wholly to Mitchell, focuses for the most part on his pedagogical practice, day to day work and recent collaborations, mostly through interviews with, and recollections by, Mitchell and his students. Among the many things we learn is just how wide-ranging Mitchell's tastes and listening habits are. Having served time in the military, he has always been a lover of John Philip Sousa's brass band music. Composer/musician James Fei, a former student of his, says Mitchell had a nearly endless supply of Telemann, JS Bach and CPE Bach scores on hand. At Mills, Mitchell played Baroque pieces weekly with harpsichordist and fellow faculty member Belle Bulwinkle. Though he's now in his early eighties, Mitchell seems to be completely at home working with the most adventurous electronic composers, and has himself broken much ground in his work with non-traditional scores and performance methods. Yet, notwithstanding his well-earned reputation for iconoclasm, Fei relates how during one session Mitchell pulled out two dog-eared copies of *Universal Method For Saxophone*, "probably the most old-school set of tonal exercises and etudes for the instrument", and the two read through it for two hours straight.

Mitchell's schedule and sometimes punishing (for his students) practice regimen are legendary. "A typical day with me is up at sunrise," he says. "Sometimes I beat the sun up because, out in the sunroom, it's so beautiful when it comes up." Clarinettist John McCowen relates how, when he studied at Mills, he was often woken by Mitchell at 7am to come over and practice. "John, you've got to understand that I'm an army man," Mitchell would explain.

With all props to Sam Weinberg's career-spanning overview of Mitchell's work, and Tyshawn Sorey's micro-analysis of the groundbreaking piece of comprovisation "The Maze", what comes through most in this collection – thanks to the raft of first-person recollections – is what a generous and open-minded teacher Mitchell has been.

On the other hand, and not completely surprisingly, Mitchell talks as if he's literally still learning. After his retirement from teaching in 2018, he said, "I've been having that opportunity to be a student since then and have been totally enjoying it." And asked in an interview how he was preparing for a performance with The Iceland Symphony Orchestra in 2016, Mitchell, one of the most accomplished and influential figures in modern jazz responded, with a laugh, "Well, my goal for Iceland is to get practicing, so I can have some chops."

Dave Mandl

Time Come: Selected Prose 1975–2021

Linton Kwesi Johnson

Picador Hbk 336 pp

A life doesn't look or feel like a perfectly linear narrative, so it's a relief when a book about a life isn't written as one. Such is the case with Linton Kwesi Johnson's new collection *Time Come: Selected Prose 1975–2021*, in which the celebrated poet's portrait is pieced together in a dense collage made up not of blow by blow detail but rather of the history that Johnson and his comrades were making (to paraphrase the title of his 1984 album). Autobiographical without the burden of formal autobiography, *Time Come* offers flashes of insight into Johnson's political and aesthetic concerns, showing how their stark inextricability in his work grew out of lived experience.

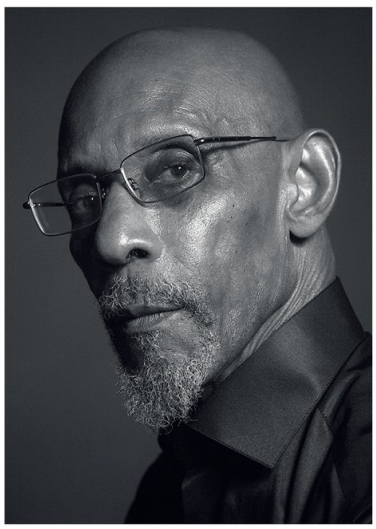
The book is comprised of a snappy introduction by Paul Gilroy and 37 pieces of Johnson's prose covering almost four decades. The latter are arranged under five thematic headings: "Reggae Sounds – Music", "Story – Literature", "Di Anfinish Revalueshan – Politics", "Tings and Times – Places And Moments", and "Beacon Of Hope – People". Each of these is populated by articles, lectures, speeches, book introductions and obituaries.

The literary and geographical locations of his many reflections are as diverse as the forms they take: from *The Times Literary Supplement* to *Race Today*, from Rhodes University to Brixton, South London. Read together, Johnson's writings demonstrate that he is, of course, much more than a firebrand poet and frontman. Given that he "came to poetry through politics", it is no surprise that these writings reinforce the impression that his lyrics are less the result of cloistered contemplation than the crystallisation of the everyday political commitment of his work as an educator, librarian, militant, and more.

The book begins with music, opening with early essays about reggae written in an emphatically rhythmic prose, "all tensed-up in the bubble and the bounce and the leap and the weight drop" of the transcribed lyrics that Johnson meticulously analyses. Published in 1976–77, the first five essays are extraordinary instances of the sociological imagination rewired in the mind of a young political poet. Inspired by WEB Du Bois's *The Souls Of Black Folk*, Johnson chose to study sociology at London Goldsmiths, where he wrote a dissertation on reggae lyricism that laid the groundwork for these pieces. They convey not only the urgency and care with which he honed his own political aesthetics, but also the excitement of a moment when, as he writes, "the popular music of Jamaica, the music of the people" was beginning to take its songs of "dread and defiance" worldwide.

Another point of the interest is the fragmented genealogy of dub poetry that emerges through these pages. Conceptualised variously as dub lyricism and social lyricism in his early essays – and resisted at times as a label for his own work – dub poetry is here parsed by way of its practitioners and predecessors. Poets Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka are two of the latter: "[Having] heard blues and jazz poetry," states Johnson, "I decided that I wanted to write reggae poetry." Such crucial lateral connections will capture the interest of the dabbler and the dedicated alike. If you want to know about the life, politics and history behind Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetry and music, you need this book.

Gabriel Bristow



Linton Kwesi Johnson

Ajamu Ikwe-Tyehimba

On Screen

Films & DVDs

We Are Fugazi, From Washington DC
Jeff Krulik, Joseph Pattisall & Joe Gross (Curators)
AFI Silver Theater, Washington DC, US

Washington DC's peculiar status within the Greater Northeastern Megalopolis – the youngest and southernmost hub, democratically disenfranchised, dominated by the inhuman palace precincts at its heart – has long helped to foment a proud and defiant tradition of alternative culture. It's from this milieu that the premiere of *We Are Fugazi, From Washington DC* at the AFI Silver Theater emerged this February. Curated by film makers Jeff Krulik and Joseph Pattisall, with author Joe Gross, the screening combines live footage recorded throughout the pioneering post-hardcore quartet's 1986–2002 run with retrospective interviews from fan-photographers to commemorate 20 years since their final live performance.

Anyone familiar with Fugazi, then as now, will know that this footage is as frequently intense as it is spellbinding. The band's legendary ferocity, all sweat and sinew, springs eternal as their material develops, from its earliest anthemic pummelling, to a skeletal, almost microtonal weave by the turn of the century. While Jem Cohen's brooding *Instrument* (1999) remains the definitive portrait, *We Are Fugazi* exults in that dimension of DIY ethics the band so adamantly championed.

Like their counterculture forebears, Fugazi had an open door photography policy. The images that resulted are as much the fruits of fascination as opportunity, as when videographer Jim Spelman takes up a crow's nest perch on a partially constructed backstage structure to shoot a heaving Wilson Center crowd from above. Indelible, too, are the moments – more than once – when the band overcome power shortages and equipment failures, their routine so tight that pounding refrains are bootstrapped into menacing hushes until voltage can be gloriously restored.

Fugazi's commitments – to community spaces, all-ages performances, self-funded tours and recordings – were, of course, political. As designer Carni Klirs illustrates in his *Visualizing Fugazi* project, featured in the film, the band raised roughly a quarter of a million dollars at various benefits played on behalf of organisations for homeless relief, AIDS research and the environment, among others. The number becomes even more impressive considering the band's famous $5 ticket policy, which the theater has honoured for its screenings.

On stage as well as in interviews, the band have the carriage of a cultural guerrilla unit. Early hardcore shows could exude stochastic violence and beer-soaked loss of control. Nearly a decade after helping to found the movement with his band Minor Threat, as well as its internal sobriety-driven straight edge reformation, MacKaye is adept at harnessing (within limits) the live show's inherent chaos. In between seismic bursts of dissonant electric guitar and a drill instructor's blaring report, it's not uncommon to hear MacKaye or fellow guitarist/vocalist Guy Picciotto disciplining fans like older brothers. During an outdoor performance in view of the phallic obelisk of the Washington Monument, Picciotto dresses down a pair of violent audience members while mocking their love of ice cream.

Through the humour and the earnestness, there is a prevailing sense of something being worked toward collectively – a co-construction the band can only achieve if they bring every last member of the audience along with them. Testimony from amateurs, professionals and amateurs-turned-professionals like Jim Saah, Eddie Becker and Lance Bangs gives faces to the grass roots that made the Fugazi phenomenon, from the Wilson Center to DuPont Circle to Fort Reno – not just musical, but social as well. For Bangs, theirs was an example of "ethically leading a life of freedom" – the spirit of everything that was promised and denied by the city of their birth.

Ryan Meehan

Fugazi, *Positron Video Zine* Issue #4

Fugazi perform "Song #1", Wilson Center, Washington, DC, 1988

Sean Capone (Positron); Jim Spellman ("Song #1")

Stills from *I Get Knocked Down* (2021); Dunstan Bruce (bottom)

I Get Knocked Down
Sophie Robinson & Dunstan Bruce (Directors)
So And So Pictures 2021, 87 mins

Somewhere during the development of this film about UK anarcho-pop band Chumbawamba a decision was made to put director and former co-frontman Dunstan Bruce at the centre to create an engaging narrative arc. It's a little ironic that Bruce's stated motivation seven years ago during the Kickstarter campaign was to tell *The Untold Story Of Chumbawamba* (as the original subtitle put it) and for "the story" not to get lost. But Bruce's story – a man in his late fifties anxious that the world is going to hell in a handcart and wondering what he should do about it – jostles for position with the group's story. In the process the chance for a more in-depth look at the band's question everything, practical solidarity and troublemaking rich history has been missed.

This nevertheless enjoyable production starts with Bruce visiting his fellow bandmates to see what they're up to and get reflections on their time in the band. Other members seem settled – Alice Nutter is a playwright and scriptwriter; Harry Hamer seems to do music theatre and continues to play drums; Danbert Nobacon continues to record and perform as a solo artist; and Boff Whalley directs the inspiring Commoners Choir which is oddly not mentioned here. But Bruce appears to have drifted in an unfocused way.

There's some great archive footage of a politically charged Leeds in the 1970s – from where the band emerged – and of the time the band lived communally at the Southview House squat (from 1982 when the group began until 1999 – two years after they had become a household name). They made an early decision to move away from Crass-inspired angry protest music to a more joyful and populist approach. But their expectation-defying moves through different musical phases – from theatrical shouty punk to a cappella trad protest songs and then sample-heavy pop – aren't paid much attention here.

Instead the focus of the story gets reduced to the "Tubthumping" moment – the point at which they had reached a low point internally, making the decision to up their game and aim for a mass audience by signing with EMI. Almost immediately they have an anthemic hit with the song which, with its theme of everyday resilience, resonated widely with English-speaking audiences around the world.

Disowned by their anarcho-musical peers, how well did Chumbawamba exploit the brief global exposure this afforded them? Famously they called out New Labour for refusing to support striking dock workers during the Brit Awards and drenched the deputy prime minister John Prescott at the same event. In the US they trumpeted their support for the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal campaign on TV's *The Late Show*. Bruce is still troubled by the sell out accusations and submits himself to the judgement of radical film maker Ken Loach, Crass's Penny Rimbaud and historian Lucy Robinson. Isolated from a community that was mutually nurturing and without a political road map to fall back on, his eventual solution is to form punk rock trio Interrobang?! and write songs that honestly communicate his dilemmas directly to others of his generation. "Unrest is progress! Contentment death!" is one of his slogans. Loach and Robinson have urgent messages about the necessity of people getting together and fighting "on every coal front" if we want to secure a livable and biologically diverse home.

To give the directors the benefit of the doubt, you could say that employing Bruce as guide gives viewers the opportunity to think about what our response to the current multiple unfolding crises should be.

Phil England

Courtesy So And So Pictures

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

Michael Snow Memorial
Music Gallery, Toronto, Canada
Until recently, the film maker and composer Michael Snow (10 December 1928–5 January 2023) was known as "Canada's greatest living artist", an honorific for which he was proud, but which always obscured what he thought was his greatest accomplishment: his music. As a result, he would have chuckled at the news that his public memorial requires the art community to sit silently while his longtime musical collaborators, CCMC (Canadian Creative Music Collective) perform a live improv set in his honour. Around 200 stalwarts of the art scene dutifully fill the 918 Bathurst Centre for Culture, a converted Buddhist Temple that serves as the current home of the itinerant Music Gallery, a performance space founded by original CCMC members.

On stage is an expanded version of the CCMC line-up, including Snow's original co-founders, Nobuo Kubota (voice/percussion) and Al Mattes (electric bass); longtime participants John Kamevaar (Octapad Digital Percussion Pad), John Oswald (tenor sax), Paul Dutton (voice); and recent regular Mani Mazinani (CAT Synthesizer). Casey Sokol is unfortunately unable to join due to recent knee surgery, and while his contribution would have been most welcome, it's fitting that the piano bench, where Snow had sat, remains empty.

After a joke by Dutton apologising for being late – "We were trying to put together a set list" – Kubota leads off with a low chant and a small sound box that provides a synthetic drone undertow. As usual, Kubota plays with language and voice – alternating between Japanese and gibberish and lampooning the local audience's inability to tell the difference. His eulogy begins seriously, but slowly moves into the surreal when he starts hitting his head with an amplified rubber hammer, triggering a loud, humorous *"tok"*.

A low bass sound slowly comes in and the rest of the group join the fray. Dutton's buzzing kisses and vocal splats duet with Oswald's saxophone squeaks as Mattes provides bass runs underneath. Mazinani's CAT synthesizer playing offers counterpoint, along with sonic homages to Snow, who often used the same synthesizer in performance. Early on the CAT's high whistles evoke Snow's whistle solos from his film *Rameau's Nephew*, and later a deep octave dive calls to mind a sequence from *La Région Centrale*.

After staying in the background for the first part of the set, Kamevaar takes a prominent role with his Octapad, presenting a sudden rhythmic drum solo. Kubota takes the baton back – literally – hitting his head a few more times before launching into another vocal solo that leads into an extended group improv filled with paired timbres: two voices, the sax and the synth, the drum and the bass, with the hi-hat riding high above.

The absurdity of the moment, seven grown men making strange and odd noises in honour of a dead friend, contrasts with the particular virtuosity of their performance. Finally, the sounds scale back, releasing tensions, but Oswald won't let it go, leading to another Kamevaar drum solo with Mazinani's bass synth underpinning. Dutton's throat flutters, Oswald squawks again and a cell phone rings in the audience and brings us back to earth.

At the intermission, Laurie Kwasnik presents a ten minute cut of her work-in-progress, *Fields Of Snow*, which focuses on his musical performances over the years. The footage is a revelation, especially a sequence dating back to the 1950s with Snow burning it up as a ragtime piano player. Further footage of Snow playing is looped in a video gallery in a separate room, playing concurrently to the concert and through the intermission. I don't partake, but it is nice to know that Snow is playing somewhere close by.

The intermission allows the less diehard music fans to cycle back into the night, on to another gallery opening or home for an aspirin. After a decent pause, CCMC make their way back onto the stage for a second set. The tension of the earlier set, with a packed crowd and something to prove, doesn't quite carry through into the next one, but the interplay of old friends is still pleasurable.

As the second set winds its way down, a heckler makes her way towards the stage, quietly taunting the group. While some members ignore her interjections, Oswald lends her a mic and Mary Margaret O'Hara joins in, adding her own vocal flutters and whoops to the music, backed by brother Marcus, who slowly lets the air out of a half-deflated balloon. When CCMC's improv fizzles, Mary Margaret O'Hara steps up to the front mic to sing a final verse from a Patsy Cline song: *"I love you so much, it hurts me/Darlin', that's why I'm so blue/I'm so afraid to go to bed at night/Afraid of losing you"*.
Chris Kennedy

John Dikeman/Pat Thomas/John Edwards/ Steve Noble
Lit & Phil, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
Tyneside is the first stop on the stellar quartet's UK mini-tour. Their performance reminds me that free jazz fire music, over 50 years old, has evolved its own common practice. In its early days, this challenging music received little support and much abuse; now it attracts quite large and very enthusiastic audiences. The gig is sold out on the night, with about 60 people filling this compact and historic venue – post-Covid, music audiences are finally picking up.

This is the second time the quartet have played together. The first was in 2019, when they made a recording at London's Cafe Oto, recently released as *Volume 1* by the 577 label. Pat Thomas (piano), John Edwards (bass) and Steve Noble (drums) are familiar figures to UK audiences, American tenor player John Dikeman much less so. Dikeman, born in 1983, grew up in Wyoming. Moving to the East Coast, he studied with Milford Graves and Joe Maneri; pioneer free improv saxophonist Jack Wright was a major influence. Dikeman worked with Nate Wooley and Daniel Carter, before finally settling in Amsterdam. William Parker and Hamid Drake inspired him after he discovered them on record as a teen, and he now shares a trio with them.

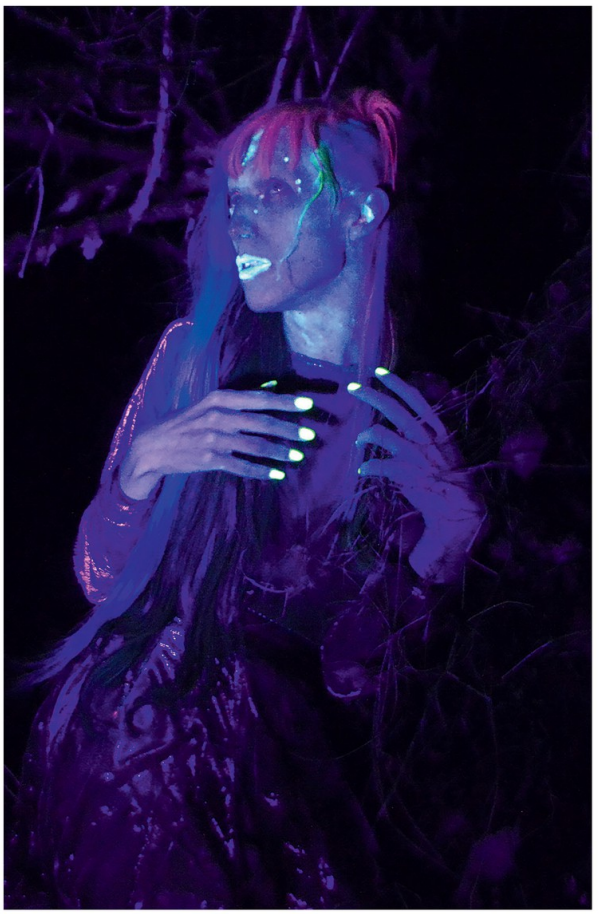
I first encountered Dikeman's explosive music at Amsterdam's Bimhuis, with his trio Universal Indians plus guest Joe McPhee. Dikeman's playing has Albert Ayler's huge, thick, grainy, vocalised tone. The sound is all, and squalling lines unfold essentially simple melodic material. The holiness church origins of free jazz are real for Dikeman. Some years ago, he explained to me by email that "Coltrane... was Old Testament, where Ayler was the New Testament – ecstatic and rejoicing!" With Dikeman involved, a performance is rarely less than blistering.

Shifting swing and tumbling free jazz momentum is one very skilful aspect of the group's work. Edwards and Noble steer the group through ever-changing time-feels including episodes of slurred swing – towards the end of the first set, a swing groove segues into a free ballad. This is postmodern freedom. Noble's thematic approach to drumming is clearest in his solos – the first one is notable for an Ed Blackwell-ish use of beaters.

Another subtlety is the way the quartet switch through every instrumental combination – tenor saxophone and drums duos reminiscent of Coltrane and Rashied Ali, piano and saxophone, and so on. The bass amp fails on the night, so the quartet courageously do without any amplification – to my mind, the results are preferable. John Edwards is one of the loudest bassists unamplified, with a lot of slapping and pulling.

Both sets feature fully improvised, no holds barred expressionist fire music – an arch form with an incandescent climax, and no obvious use of compositions. A highlight of the second set is a rather baroque episode of fluttering, trilling solo piano by Pat Thomas. The improvisation concludes in a quick march-like feel with staccato punctuations and slap-tongued saxophone, segueing into pointillism. On the dirge-like coda, Dikeman sounds closer to late Coltrane than Ayler. The friend I am with finds the high intensity too unrelenting – a common criticism of fire music. But as Dikeman would insist, the sound is all.
Andy Hamilton

Saidi Kanda & Mvula Mandondo
The Rose Hill, Brighton, UK
Tanzanian multi-instrumentalist and singer Saidi Kanda has lived in the UK for over 30



The Ephemeron Loop

Vymethoxy Redspiders's latest noise project is a cathartic journey into the void and back

By Ilia Rogatchevski

The Ephemeron Loop
Cafe Oto, London, UK

The venue is plunged into darkness. A sonic assault ensues. The processed drums strike the ear with an industrial regularity. The sound is heavy and repetitive like endless rows of pumpjacks nodding in an oil field. Coloured spotlights frame Vymethoxy Redspiders (Miss VR) aka The Ephemeron Loop in a halo of blue.

She plays guitar, stationed behind a MIDI controller, which is connected to a laptop nearing its teenage years. In a moment of respite, Miss VR takes to the mic. Channelling Elizabeth Fraser of The Cocteau Twins, her vocals envelop the room like a velvet mist. This moment of vulnerability is propped up with hazy guitar effects that evoke the secret majesty of a sleeping city. Until, that is, we are overcome by further bursts of speedcore and screaming.

Miss VR is a prolific musician who performs under different pseudonyms and lends her talents to a multitude of projects, each of which looks at the art of noise making from different perspectives. She is perhaps best known for being one half of the Leeds duo Guttersnipe whose off-kilter brand of noise rock takes the audience on visceral excursions. Her solo project Petronn Sphene, meanwhile, is a relentless barrage of gabber beats and disintegrating electronics. The Ephemeron Loop combines the two extremes of guitar based songwriting and high tempo dance music to form a new palette of richly layered psychedelic nuances.

Last year's debut *Psychonautic Escapism* took Vymethoxy Redspiders 14 years to complete. The album is composed of fragmented sessions – reprocessed and woven into new arrangements by Miss VR and producer Ross Halden – and draws its influence from shoegaze, rave and the Leeds queer underground scene. As the album title suggests, psychedelic drugs also factor in the mix, catalysing the artist's self-realisation and forging her identity as a neurodivergent trans woman.

The record translates well onto the stage. The disparate stylistic elements of hardcore rhythms, guitar freakouts and sublime instrumental passages stack up on top of each other like multicoloured building blocks.

Although the resulting structure may look unconventional, it is stable and fit for purpose. Close your eyes and the sweeping gusts, metallic scrapes and glitches take you to the centre of a derelict shopping mall at the moment of its demolition. Open your eyes and witness the audience in abandon, fists furiously pumping in time to the frantic beats.

Miss VR is acutely aware of the music's summoning power. Her body movements and facial expressions mimic electricity. It's what you might see in a strobe light snapshot at a club: the searing white flash arresting a stranger's gestures and imprinting them upon your mind.

The gig concludes with a rumbling bass resembling a soft explosion. When undertaking a psychedelic journey, it's worthwhile surrendering yourself to the active ingredient. That's the key to having a transformative experience. Vymethoxy Redspiders surrenders to the sound, drawing from it a nurturing energy, in spite of the music's dark overtones. She invites us to follow her – like Eurydice into the underworld – down endless back rooms lit with flickering fluorescent bulbs, past people with fluid features and cruel intentions.

It's a disorientating trip, but when you finally reach the exit, you find that the sun has already come up, you've shed your skin and left your former self behind. Just remember not to look back. ○

Layla Legard

years, and most of them in Brighton, so tonight's sold-out gig is a hometown show. For the anthropologically minded it's also a fine opportunity to observe at close quarters a phenomenon we might call WOMAD people. The Rose Hill is rammed with a certain type of middle-aged fan with a well-heeled, hippie-ish mien.

As it turns out, that whiff of tie-dye is not entirely out of place. Kanda's group Mvula Mandondo (usually a quintet but, tonight, one guitarist down and playing as a quartet) is a rambling jam band that surprises me all night by sounding exactly like an East African Grateful Dead. Seriously, take The Dead's version of "I Know You Rider" and replace the US folk-blues source material with a traditional Tanzanian folk song and this is what you'd get.

Kanda's certainly well-versed in the folklore. He comes from a musical family and took lessons from his griot grandmother, Mua Vita Kanda, who is cited (at least by Kanda) as one of Tanzania's greatest folk singers. He cut his teeth working as a percussionist with Tanzanian guitarist Remmy Ongala in the 1980s and, on all the self-made instruments he plays tonight, he shows a percussive approach to building and maintaining complex patterns that underpin the band's free-flowing grooves. A large silver box that he wears on a sturdy strap over his shoulder houses a thumb piano with which he generates a low burble (later, outside, he tells me that, for live shows, he prefers to use a limba like this with thicker, heavier keys). He also plays a guitar with a body fashioned from two rectangular cooking pans on which he picks chiming, trebly circularities, and a traditional six-string harp with a large, barrel-shaped body that sends out delicately cascading arpeggios. His voice is a fruity rumble belting out joyously catchy hooks with help from backing singer and hype man Fabrah Moses.

The rest of the band are charged with feeding the groove. Bass guitarist Billy Mwangura slots into Kanda's riffs, finding simple cycles that he decorates with minimal elaborations while never straying too far from basecamp. Drummer Milba Kapamby is a confounding presence: dropping in and out at will with no apparent regard for bar lengths or structure, smashing out loud solos seemingly at random, hunkering into a pounding four-four rock beat with no warning, even getting up and wandering off stage every now and then. Returning to the stage after one of these forays, he wobbles perilously at its edge and I wonder if he might possibly be somewhat over-refreshed – but then he sits down and drops straight into a tight highlife funk that suggests he's been fully in control all along.

The final piece of the puzzle is guitarist Kawele Mutimanwa. For much of the time, he shadows Kanda's riffs, picking out jangling figures with a bright, toppy sheen. But he's also given plenty of room to take long, exploratory solos that are fascinating and unexpected in their total avoidance of blues cliches. As the evening wears on, Mutimanwa keeps turning up his amp, goading Kapamby to play even louder and creating an atmosphere of friendly delirium. There is much dancing.

Daniel Spicer

Ida

Numero Twenty
Palace Theater, Los Angeles, US

I find it hard to contain my excitement walking to the Palace Theater in downtown Los Angeles. I had bought tickets for Numero Twenty the day it was announced. The festival, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Chicago based record label Numero Group, features ten bands who were primarily active between the 1980s and early 2000s, and represent a bygone era of post-hardcore, indie rock, slowcore and emo. I had never seen any of these bands before (I'm 30), and was shocked a few were even playing at all. My expectations were astronomically high.

It's perhaps no surprise, then, that I would be disenchanted with the whole affair, at least initially. Sitting down near the back of the venue – a former vaudeville theatre built more than a century ago – I find myself perplexed by the setting. Why is everyone seated? Why are the lights above me still on? Did all my romanticising of DIY scenes from decades past amount to... fans politely sitting in an opulent theatre? Is this just another cash-in on nostalgia?

The first set, from post-rock outfit Ui, is a decent appetiser: I can feel the kick drum pounding in my chest, with their guitar melodies and wobbling bass working through slick, danceable grooves. People stand up as soon as they finish. I think it is a standing ovation; seconds later, I realise they are running to the bathroom. As I explore the rest of the venue, I feel uneasy about the massive record fair Numero Group is hosting downstairs, right next to the Pabst Bar, a corporation-sponsored space lined with old flyers for the bands' past shows. I feel sick.

I begin to appreciate Numero Twenty as the event goes on. I move to the balcony for Tsunami's set to get a clearer view of the band, which features Jenny Toomey and Kristin Thomson in cute matching outfits. Their harmonising was always great on record, but to hear a song like "Be Like That" performed live with full-on belting sends chills across my body. Chisel are a lot of fun too, the trio at their best when leaning into power pop ebullience. "It's Alright, You're OK", for example, is a delight to experience when seeing singer Ted Leo nimbly glide across the stage.

Such giddy exuberance is a neat counter to Karate's total professionalism. The mix could not be better, highlighting Geoff Farina's tight guitar playing and the band's undeniable cohesion. Every note has incredible weight, and I feel deeply that none of their recorded output could compare with how massive they sound on stage.

They would've had the most arresting set of the festival if it weren't for Unwound. Early on, drummer Sara Lund asks the audience to stand up and move forward, transforming the tenor of the performance. It's crucial to have this physical interaction with their music – loud, furious, spellbinding – as they mainly stick with songs from *New Plastic Ideas, Fake Train*, and *Repetition*.

Unwound's altar call affects the second day of Numero Twenty, as fans remain standing throughout the entire evening. Rex play stripped down versions of songs from their last two albums, while Ida play songs across their catalogue before ending with a beautiful cover of Low's "Two-Step". Both bands sound so achingly beautiful that it is almost a shock to head into Everyone Asked About You's Midwest emo set. The band are the biggest anomaly of the festival, and I knew before attending that they'd be indicative of a generational divide (I have never seen anyone over the age of 35 talk about them; almost everyone I know under 30 who follows emo loves them). It becomes clear how true this is when they start playing, as the youngest audience members move close to the stage and excitedly jump up and down. Older folks I saw in the crowd leave or are on their phones (one, in a hilarious contrast to the kids I'd seen earlier browsing social media, is reading on his Kindle app). To see the band exert such youthful energy is a treat – a reminder that no matter how old you get, you can still channel the vitality of your teenage years.

I get that same impression with The Hated's discography-spanning set. Their songs – some of which anticipated 90s emo, some of which are firmly rooted in their hardcore beginnings – are a testament to how varied their songwriting was, and how they could use their stylistic boundlessness to tap into a vast array of emotions. Codeine's closing set is a more straightforward affair, but they lock into a specific mood that keeps the audience enraptured. They seem to bring all the generations together, made obvious by the Gen Z and Gen X couples flanking me. When everyone sings *"I want you to need me"* during "D", I feel like Numero Twenty has succeeded in what it set out to do: generations of people coming together to celebrate bands for their timelessness.

Joshua Minsoo Kim

Tears | OV + The Howling
The Horse Hospital, London, UK

Clowns have remained firmly locked in the vaults of my childhood memory, terrifying nightmares that followed thankfully rare but obligatory family circus trips. Until I found myself heading towards Bloomsbury's

Robert Nunez

Horse Hospital experimental arts venue for a performance marking the closing night of Drôle, an intriguing exhibition of "rare clown costume and ephemera". Curated by Alexia Marmara, it features exhibits from The Clown Museum and Lumière & Son.

A short walk from the overwhelming high rise plastic-cladded architecture that caused the recent demise of many musicians' beloved Denmark Street, there's a fragile surviving corner of London Dickensia with cobbled street, pub and a perfectly intact Victorian building. There's no easily discernible entrance but, gathering sufficient common sense to ring a doorbell round the side, I'm led down a long sloping cobbled entrance – mindful of the fear a sick horse might have clip-clopping down the echoey walkway – into a bright room full of clown costumes, past, present and ancient, oversized shoes, photos, film clips, comic sounds.

We are welcomed by Deborah Wale's well-researched film comprising weird, colourful, funny, sad and downright terrifyingly bizarre fast-moving micro-clips from archive footage of clowning history to an appropriate soundtrack full of bleeps, bloops and fanfares. Multimedia artists and experimental musicians Tears | OV perform "Send In The Clowns". Their performance is an entrancing mix of theatrical sound art and musical collage from live structured improvisations and electronics. This evening's line-up includes illustrator, musician and prison psychotherapist Deborah Wale, sound artist and musician Lori E Allen and drummer, juggler and guitarist Tom Loffman in a clown-inflected multimedia show. Wale plays electric guitar, scratches with DJ Pro on an iPad between comic capers, blowing up and bursting balloons, and dancing through the audience playing a Korg mini-Monotron through a portable mini-loudspeaker. Her make-up is inspired by the 1959 Russian animation of Tolstoy's 1936 Pinnochio-ish *The Adventures of Buratino*. Allen is on eerie vocoded vocals and acoustic guitar playing samples from Ableton, with makeup inspired by Vojtěch Jasný's 1976 film *The Clown*. There's a backdrop film by Chigdem Karadogan with looped clips of various grotesque, greedy, grumpy, happy, dancing clowns transforming pain into laughter.

A fascinating film by Charles Eames follows, of clowns applying their makeup in slow, close-up real-time, each one pulling a little face when finished to test its effect – so much of a clown's art is in this intricate face painting craft, layers upon layers of paint, powder and fine pencil lines.

The Howling close the night, with Radiophonic Workshop reincarnator Robin The Fog on four unpredictable Uher reel-to-reel tape machines, labelled Daphne, Delia, Elizabeth and Maddalena, to help him identify each machine. Robin The Fog maximises the ethereal sonic enrichment peculiar to slowed down and layered tape loops from three machines playing recordings and found sounds. Daphne is used for live delay, feedback and rhythmic pulses. He's clearly mastered tape techniques to a level of expertise that would make his muses proud. The music accompanies Ken Hollings's wonderful narration of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*, in which he has morphed Gray's mirror image from monster to clown. Throughout, a kitsch chopped-up video of Hulk Hogan plays sound that Robin The Fog calls echolalia.

It's a dynamic, soundful, vivid, chaotic evening with plenty of mood changes, a feast for all the senses, everything you might hope for from a night of experimental clowning.

Jo Hutton

Pierre Bastien

Pierre Bastien + Louis Laurain
The Rose Hill, Brighton, UK

An endangered 1870 pub saved from luxury flat conversion in 2015 has become one of Brighton's most adventurous music venues. The Rose Hill provides a quaint setting for the performances of two French artists: instrument builder Pierre Bastien, supported by cornet player Louis Laurain. A large ceramic hound crouches at the front of the stage and vintage floor lamps, floor cushions, tealights and ornaments around the bar complete the picture of one luxurious lounge.

Bastien finds a musical soul mate in Laurain, who developed his solo performances during the great interruption of lockdown. "He is taking the cornet to the bridge," says the event's presenter, as Laurain arrives on stage with his instrument, itself a French invention from the early 19th century. Seated on a stool, his opening melody is soon pulled apart by extended techniques, using bird call whistles that serve up humour: a formal brass band instrument upended by a honk and a quack. Soon, the cornet is bell-end vertical and muted on Laurain's knee; he beats it with fingers of unerring metronome precision, later assembling a miniature tin drum kit on his lap, tapped with a metal baton.

There are no animations to accompany Laurain's performance, but the extended technique lends itself to imagined visual equivalents in its synchronicity with the noise of everyday life. At one point, the battlefield of a gameshow comes to mind, with cartoon explosions as the cornet enters its death throes.

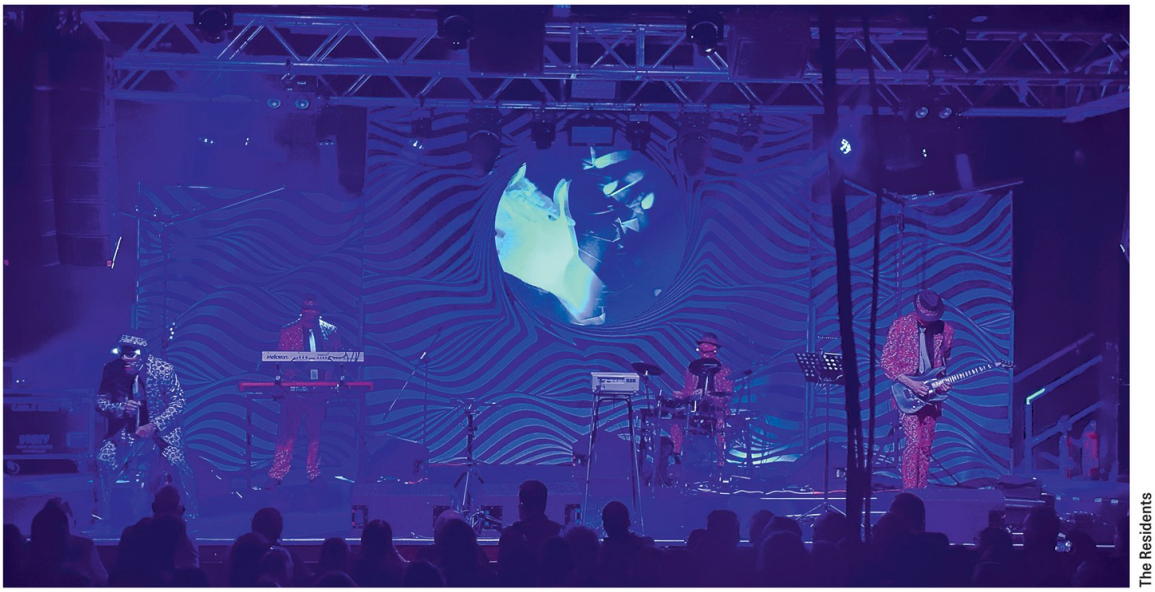
By contrast, the fascination of Bastien's act derives from the twin spectacle of his Mecanium, a kinetic sculptural contraption he first built in 1986, and the shadows it casts. A former student of 18th century French literature, Bastien's arrival on these shores with his invention in a suitcase, and an audience gathered to watch, chimes with the long ago, when onlookers crowded round a fairground act or magic trick or circus show. I felt I was attending an 18th century Lunar Society meeting, waiting to be introduced to some ground-breaking experiment, or witnessing a Daguerre diorama theatre show.

Comprising Meccano girders and uprights, rotating wheels and pulleys, and powered by turntable motors, the Mecanium shakes into life when its wheels begin to rattle and turn and its two spotlights switch on, projecting giant sliding shadows across walls and ceiling. This difference in scale between the original and its shadow sets us up for another incongruity. The small interventions that Bastien makes as he moves round his machine-instrument, adding or subtracting an element here and there, have an immediate effect on mood and amplified sound. During the performance, he is building cathedral organ pipes out of fluted paper tubes, slotting them onto the rig, or bowing taut wire strings fixed like a bow harp, or he is accompanying the Mecanium on the pocket trumpet. When a white paper sail flaps, we're at sea; feverish stutterings take us to a mad grumble factory; a tube in a water jug lands us in a potion-bubbling laboratory.

Bastien's show at The Rose Hill is fairly stripped down compared to previous performances that have included several hundred different parts. His melodic trumpet accompaniment is a pleasing addition, bringing with it an ambience of nostalgia and longing, but the act is short on surprises. I feel I've been here before...

Deborah Nash

Ed Briggs



The Residents

Riot Ensemble: Sonic Illusions
King's Place, London, UK
I was cutting it a little fine, so had to wolf down a rather large bowl of very spicy noodles then race through London, vaulting the escalators on the Tube two steps at once to make it on time. The moment Alvin Lucier's *Criss-Cross* begins, I immediately regret it. The work's drifting microtonal textures can have strange effects on body and mind. Great dollops of Lao Gan Ma crispy chilli oil, likewise.

A decade ago, I saw one of the first performances of the piece at the Louvre in Paris, with the two electric guitars played by Stephen O'Malley and Oren Ambarchi. In the museum's vast auditorium in 2013, the sound was huge, cavernous, floating about the hall like a cloud on the brink of rain. In the closer confines of King's Place's Hall Two, the effect is far more intimate, but no less magical (picture the close-up tricks of David Blaine versus the stadium sorcery of David Copperfield).

With their guitars laid flat, E-bows resting on the strings, Riot Ensemble's Pétur Jónasson and Jack Ross touch only the tuning pegs, slowly traversing the tiny pitch space between two semi-tones over the course of its 15 minute running time, producing a myriad of shifting beat frequencies. At such small intervals, I hear the two sounds less as distinct pitches, more a single, ever-changing rhythm. Or rather, it is more like an unstable parallax: one moment a pulse, then a flutter, then a shimmering chorus, then beating once more. A whole world opening up in the tiniest interstitial space.

The piece is preceded by a short solo for double bass. At just five minutes, José Manuel Serrano's *Balbulus* (played by Marianne Schofield) has a furtive, slippery quality to it. Short lyrical flurries across the whole length of the instrument, from its highest harmonics to its deepest thonks, are teased and pursued by a slightly eerie-sounding electronic component. It is as if the reverb tail is playfully wresting itself free from its acoustic source. I am reminded of the familiar cartoon conceit of a character's shadow taking on a life of its own.

After the formal austerity of the Lucier, Jasmine Morris's *Atom Cry* sounds positively gothic. With its crashing chords bursting from a pair of highly distorted, tremolo guitars, a surging rumble of electronics (played by Morris herself), and a dramatically scored string trio spread around the corners of the room, the piece has a dark cinematic quality that would not have sounded out of place in an episode of *True Detective*. New music premieres rarely go this heavy.

It is fortunate that my noodle supper has settled somewhat by the time the night's finale, James Tenney's *Glissade*, begins. Few works in the canon have such a dizzying effect. I've never experienced synaesthesia, but I can only imagine someone prone to the condition would perceive the first movement, with its overlapping sleigh-rides through the upper partials of the three string instruments (viola, cello and bass), like the tunnel of light sequence from the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Schofield, Louise McMonagle and Stephen Upshaw play with a clarity and precision that only emphasise the sheer mind-bending weirdness of the piece. Even with the electronic tape delays mixed fairly low, it sounds like far more instruments than the few onstage. By the time the thunderous trills of the fifth and final movement begin, I feel utterly electrified. A wild and mesmerizing end to an evening rich in psychoacoustic weirdness.

Robert Barry

The Residents
Brudenell Social Club, Leeds, UK
Opening with a cover of Hank Williams's "Jambalaya (On The Bayou)", denoting their southern heritage, The Residents mark 50 years of swimming upstream against tradition with their Faceless Forever tour. The tour re-emerged from pandemic delay to present renditions of 1978's *Duck Stab* in the style of 2020's *Metal, Meat & Bone: The Songs of Dyin'Dog*, their record similarly concerning itself with the works of a southern singer-songwriter (albeit a seemingly fictional one). A further year of rescheduling conveniently aligned with the group's semicentennial anniversary, so while the aforementioned records are adequately accounted for, fans are treated to a broad variety of retrospective reconfigurations.

Representing the atonal synthesis of early period works in a rockist manner leads to an entertaining affair, with one fellow attendee drawing unexpected comparisons to early Swans. The decidedly brutal prog aspect to the proceedings is perhaps not entirely surprising given their collaboration with the likes of Fred Frith on 1980's *Commercial Album*, a track from which ("Moisture") gladly features.

While many listeners concern themselves largely with the works of The Residents prior to utilisation of digital technology (their early adoption of which rendering this a rather narrow spectrum), there seems a failure to recognise the group as originators of an aural aesthetic comparable to Coil's. Such work comprises the majority of their discography, and likewise much of the setlist, save for a glimmer of debut *Meet The Residents* and an encore of 1980's "Diskomo".

There's a whole other world behind The Residents' eyeball masks – a wealth of southern gothic sensibility and uncanny dark ambience. The Faceless Forever setlist treads the literary pessimism of the group by way of cuts such as "Boxes Of Armageddon" (*The Bunny Boy*, 2008) and "The Monkey Man" (*Animal Lover*, 2005). It contends with a cultural inheritance of contradiction by way of biblical violence in the likes of "Kill Him!" from 1998's *Wormwood*, and with an evil of settler necessity in its takes on traditional cowboy songs in the form of "Buckaroo Blues" and "The Stampede". We are left with a stern warning during the encore, wherein the levity of "Diskomo" gives way to the aptly titled "Nobody Laughs When They Leave" from 1990's *Freak Show*.

Though there has historically been a preoccupation with the inside of the eyeball masks donned by the group, there's no value in

Tobi Blackman

writing about the proposed identity of whoever appears to be a Resident at any given time. To do so is entirely beside the point. If you go behind the eye, into the skull cavity, therein lies a profound consideration of these interior matters.

Helena Celle

Howl
Kings Place, London UK

Howl is a seven piece vocal ensemble; tonight they perform in the round, facing each other, and from memory, on a small stage in Hall Two at Kings Place. Their one-hour set rockets through 20 pieces including new compositions, folk song arrangements and field recordings.

Mostly the vocal style is unadorned, vibrato-less and direct. They start with an arrangement of "He Mandu", a Scottish waulking song traditionally sung by women sitting round a table working sodden tweed to make it durable. In "Greenwood Side" (Howl's version of a murder ballad often known as "The Cruel Mother") they sing about an abandoned woman murdering her children with a penknife. There is a song about a servant drowning unnoticed in a river ("Nobody Knew She Was There"). There is a song about swimming towards a dead body that turns out to be yourself floating in the Hackney portion of the Regent's Canal: *"a meal on which the fish will feed"* ("Sink Down There"). All three are composed or arranged by Lydia Samuels and taken together themes of female labour, death, neglect and violence (both as perpetrator and victim) emerge.

Howl is a vocally chameleon ensemble. "Fallen Sun", a collaboration between Howl and the writer Robert MacFarlane, keeps veering off in unexpected directions, chromatic chords giving way to bluesy moments and more fulsome operatic singing with occasional shades of Oxbridge chapel choir. In the middle of the set the super sweet counterpoint of Rafael Suárez's arrangement of the Venezuelan traditional song "Flor De Loto" gives way to highly controlled parallel portamento in the Ladino Jewish traditional song "Noches Noches". In "Yo Soy Mi Propia Casa", another composition by Samuels, cluster chords give way to a rich and layered climax. In *Hawthorn* by Heloise Tunstall-Behrens, pipes and voices combine to make an elaborate hocketing texture, the pulse bouncing between the performers. All of these songs are very short and leave me wanting more, the set occasionally crossing the line from delicious tasting menu to bitty and unsatisfying.

A trio from within the group give a highly controlled and virtuosic performance of *Dolce Cantavi*, a strange little piece of neo-Renaissance choral music by Caroline Shaw. Shaw's innovative vocal writing and long association, as both a singer and composer, with the vocal ensemble Roomful Of Teeth perhaps provide an antecedent for Howl's resident composers Tunstall-Behrens and Lydia Samuels. There is a moment in Shaw's piece, beautifully highlighted in this performance, where one of the singers sounds a bit like a priest singing the liturgy on one note and a bit like a telegram being tapped out.

Howl sing two pieces by Meredith Monk. A version of *Cow Song* is sung over a drone produced by circling the rims of wine glasses tuned to E and, ending the set, *Panda Chant II*. *Panda Chant II* starts with a rhythmic chanting of the word *"panda"* and stamping. Once this is established, Helen Potter provides a shrieking, juddering, descending solo over the top. It is the only moment of the set where any of the singers really let rip – a bracing hammer blow between the eyes. It makes all the plainspoken folkiness seem a bit, well, plain: a glimpse of the feral side of an ensemble that is named, after all, Howl.

Edward Henderson

Adam Rudolph & Tyshawn Sorey
Roulette, New York, US

The stage is crowded with equipment and instruments for this all-percussion concert led by Rudolph and Sorey; there's a drum kit, piano, Rudolph's own station, and Sae Hashimoto, Levy Lorenzo and Russell Greenberg behind them on timpani and tuned percussion. Those are for the second half of the show. The first is Rudolph and Sorey in duet, improvising for 40 minutes.

This starts not with playing but prerecorded audio, the processed sounds of a kalimba. Rudolph stands behind his congas, and Sorey is at the drums. There's space and listening, the two carefully picking spots to fill with bits of timbre – nothing in the way of rhythm – mostly staying quiet. Out of this comes a sense of stillness which, though it may still be exotic in the Western music experience, feels absolutely organic to both players, with Rudolph grounded in the non-linear scheme of trance traditions, Sorey in the abstractions of Morton Feldman.

That organic feeling continues, building as the two become more active and co-ordinate their playing into something that can be called rhythm. This is more fundamentally a duo improvisation, however, the two playing fast and yet still quietly, listening acutely to each other and responding with sensitivity and immediacy. The ease with which they ramp up the volume and intensity belies just how fine the improvising is, the two establishing a vocabulary of sounds and creating a logical syntax and form in the moment.

Pretty soon, the music is driving and strong, then as if on cue returns to a near stillness, followed by playing that sounds free in the classic sense, with expressively structured phrases and conversations mediated by metal, wood and skins. One stretch of music rises and falls like a sinewave pattern, with Sorey playing a rather astonishing one-hand paradiddle on a tom. Rudolph seems to be exploring possible routes to an ending, but continues with the flow, working on the congas as the two find that the right ending is through fire, not ice.

After the intermission, they're joined by Hashimoto, Lorenzo and Greenberg in a conducted group improvisation that Rudolph and Sorey take turns directing. There's a halting sense of drama to start, everyone poised to see what the leaders call for, but the playing coming in fragments. There are five fine moving parts, each going in a separate direction.

Sorey moves to the piano, as the players continue to search for a way forward. Rudolph sets up some openings, and Sorey fills one with a slowish ostinato. This sets up an antagonistic passage, Sorey implacable, the others not quite gelling as Rudolph wrangles them a bit. He conjures an unexpected misterioso atmosphere for a moment, and out of that comes, finally, a strong sense of ensemble, internal listening and external purpose.

By the half-hour mark, things are rolling, Sorey is back at the drums, Rudolph is playing the kalimba, with the other three remaining attentive and active while also leaving space for each other. Sorey starts an extended drum roll that gradually grows in volume while never overheating, the force gathering all the musicians into a quick silence. It's a natural ending, but the playing continues, Rudolph now at the piano, things wandering to an amiable finish.

George Grella

Adam Rudolph (left) with Tyshawn Sorey

Todd Weinstein

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc

Anne Imhof
YOUTH
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Anne Imhof's sweepingly titled YOUTH exhibition was initially planned for the Garage Museum in Moscow but was moved to Amsterdam's Stedelijk after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Amsterdam show was partially funded by Garage, which recently lost around half its curators to self-imposed exile and has currently paused its exhibitions. The other half of the curators have stayed at the museum, which was founded back in 2008 by Dasha Zhukova and her ex-husband, the sanctioned Russian billionaire oligarch Roman Abramovich.

The overarching financial and geopolitical backdrop hangs in the air at YOUTH, which, like Imhof's previous installations and performances, has a deeply zeitgeist-y title and expressly dystopic focus. But YOUTH isn't really dystopic. Instead it's more art world dystopic: aestheticised, fashionable, cool, fetishised, softening the blow of any implied suffering, injustice and totalitarianism contained within. On a meta-level however, the show's most powerful commentary on dystopia is recursive: it's art that tells us the apocalypse is an abandoned electric guitar on a floor mattress; that totalitarianism is Instagrammable and destruction is reckless abandon at the club.

On the show's last day in January, a maze of grey lockers leads viewers on a path through various corners and niches filled with tinted glass covered in graffiti and propped against the museum's walls, the air vibrating with what sounds like the hum of servers. Eventually the corridor leads to a video work starring Imhof's muse and partner Eliza Douglas walking bare-chested in jeans through a snowy path in an abandoned industrial estate in Moscow; a wandering choreography to icy ambient electronics and the sound of winding clocks with occasional gestures of defeat, stretching, exhaustion and gun fingers. In another video, next door in a separate niche of lockers, a memorial-like metal and granite floor sculpture depicts a group of horses moving through a snowy landscape, with Douglas riding one bare-chested in a supposedly unintentional Putin reference (according to Imhof). Both video works could easily be edgy advertisements, and the fashion connection isn't hard to make: Douglas and Imhof are closely connected to Balenciaga, with Douglas one of the fashion brand's biggest models and muses and Imhof one of its biggest art world champions.

In the show's third and largest space, things becomes more labyrinthine: rows of lockers line the walkways, interspersed with car tyres, motorbikes, red-lit industrial grade chemical containers housed in metal frames, more tinted glass, screens with Douglas as an avatar and enormous customised metal pillars. Together the scene resembles a club, a darkroom, a sophisticated Balenciaga catwalk, downstairs at Berghain, or a Florentina Holzinger stage set, all minus the thrill.

Stairs lead to various platforms and hidden spaces with white padded mattresses. Occasional sound pieces play from speakers arranged on a zip-wire above the fray, sometimes in cacophonic fashion, with music composed by Eliza Douglas together with various artists, including Turkish-German rapper Ufo36 and Arca. Imhof and Douglas have also previously released the duo album *SEX* on perennial tastemaker label Pan (together with Billy Bultheel) while working on Imhof's solo show of the same name at London's Tate Modern back in 2021. Before that, the soundtrack for Imhof's Faust installation was released by Pan in 2019.

In an interview with TV station Arte about YOUTH, Imhof offered the following response to a question on why young crowds are especially drawn to her work: "They see I'm against saying 'This is art, check it out. This is different than what you know.' You know, I don't want to have anything to do with elites." In terms of art, fashion, music and financial backing, YOUTH is as elite as it gets. At best the show feels like a fundamental contradiction. At worst, it's a reminder that the road to real dystopia is paved with cynicism.

Alexander Samuels

Installation views of Anne Imhof's YOUTH (2022)

Peter Tijhuis

Christian Marclay
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

"Music," Roger Shattuck writes in *The Banquet Years*, a book about the French avant garde at the turn of the 20th century, "has always, more than other arts, taken itself as its subject. Every sonata is essentially 'about' the sonata form." The work of Christian Marclay – recently exhibited in an engaging career-spanning retrospective at the Centre Pompidou – calls those words to mind, because paradoxically it is often 'about' music.

Born in California to Swiss and American parents, Marclay grew up near Geneva. After attending art school in Massachusetts in the late 1970s, he moved to New York, where he discovered the Downtown scene. The experimentation occurring there between music subcultures and the art world provided ideal ground for him. An early video projection *Record Players* (1984), for example, reproduces a previous performance of a group of people at The Kitchen in New York playing records as if they were percussion, each person producing a joyful cacophony with a vinyl disc. Soon everyone starts snapping and breaking the records, and then finally, in a sort of Dionysian romp, stomping them on the ground. The piece asks, in what way can a record be 'played', and what music can it produce.

Many works presented here take a rather muted approach to music: they are often made out of record covers, transforming the cardboard sleeves into material for collages. Some alter the covers so as to create his *Imaginary Records* series (1987–99). There are also the *Body Mix* works (1991–92), in which Marclay overlays different album covers so that each piece makes a sort of Frankenstein'd human figure out of fragments of depictions of different performers' bodies. In one case, the head of David Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* becomes the torso of disco star Carrie Lucas, further transforming into the legs featured on the cover of Erotic Drum Band's album *Action 78*.

Through his use of collage, Marclay considers the tension between sound and vision, to quote Bowie. Other works further test these dynamics. *Investigations* (2018) is a box of 100 photographs of piano keyboards and hands, which are to be given to a pianist, who must then divine what each image is meant to notate, prior to performing. I couldn't help but wonder if the title was a pun on Erik Satie's *Vexations* – no doubt such a score would vex many musicians. Another piece, *No!* (2019), consists of 15 sheets with collages from comic book frames depicting figures with their mouths open for a vocalist to interpret.

His works examine the gap between what we see and what we hear. Much like a turntablist (another area of his practice) they recombine representations of sound and image to create unexpected meanings. For the past ten years, Marclay has become best known for his large-scale video projections collaged from films, notably *The Clock* (2010) (not on display, although its methods are echoed in other works presented at the Pompidou). *Video Quartet* (2002), a large four-channel video projection, takes scenes from films where actors play-act on instruments. In these sequences, Marclay edits together sounds to create a musical composition 'played' by the four channels of the video itself. *Telephones* (1995), perhaps the earliest of this kind, presents a series of scenes of telephones ringing in films. *Doors* (2022), which made its debut in this exhibition, is a series of figures in films opening, closing, or walking through doors. These works of his are not only feats of editing and collage, but they also 'play' sounds from sources as if they were instruments.

Sound not only becomes central but also takes on a musical, even symphonic quality. It's ironic, although not a coincidence, that, in the 1970s, when Marclay's aesthetic sensibilities formed, music itself became an art of editing, notably with dub, hiphop, ambient and early dance music. Through collage – which began as a modernist technique in visual art – music was no longer only about itself.

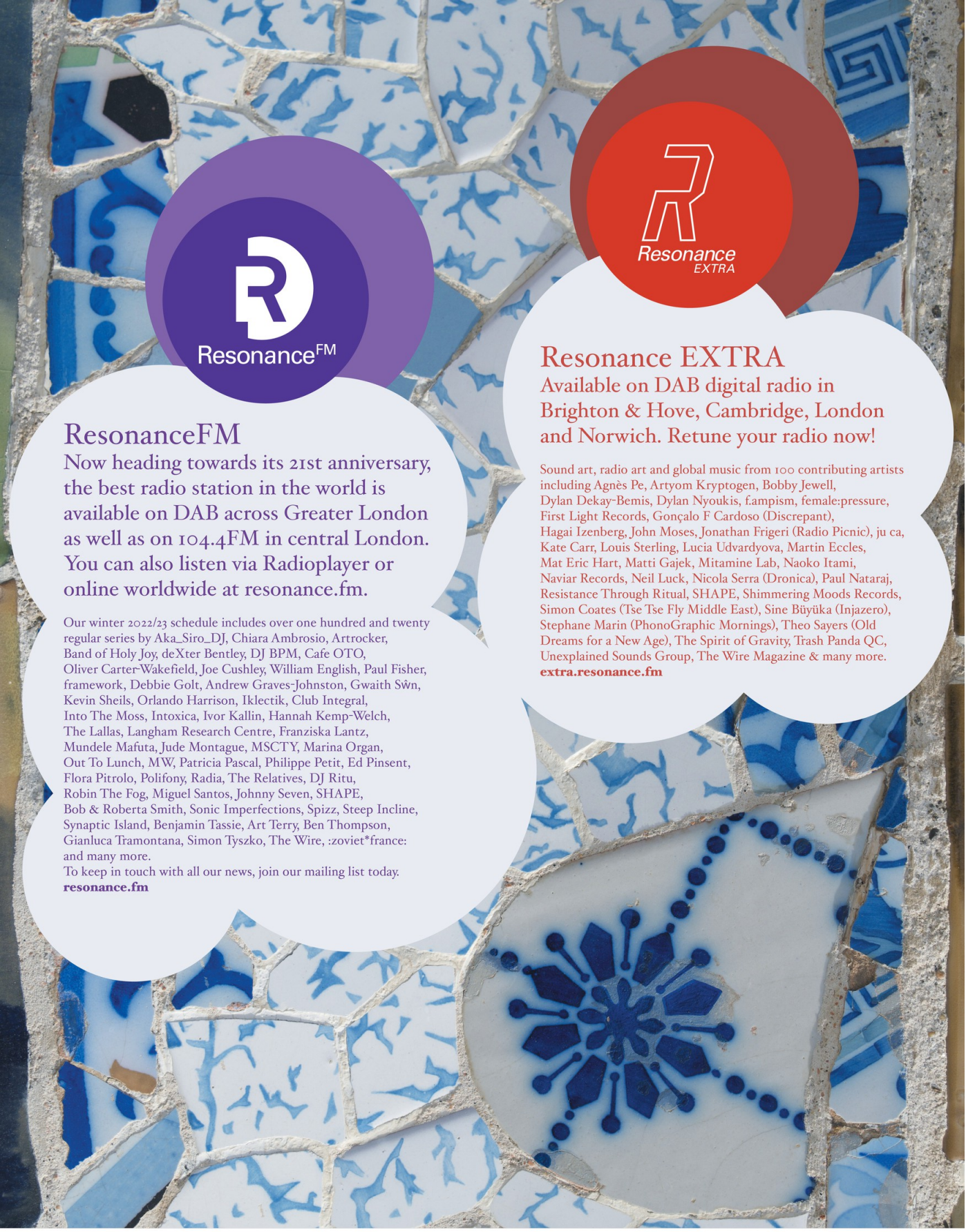
Aaron Peck

Christian Marclay, *Untitled from Recycled Records* (1985)

Christian Marclay, *Surround Sounds* (2014–15)

Christian Marclay, *Guitar Neck* (1992)

Seth Erickson (*Untitled*); Christian Marclay Studio (*Surround Sounds*, *Guitar Neck*)



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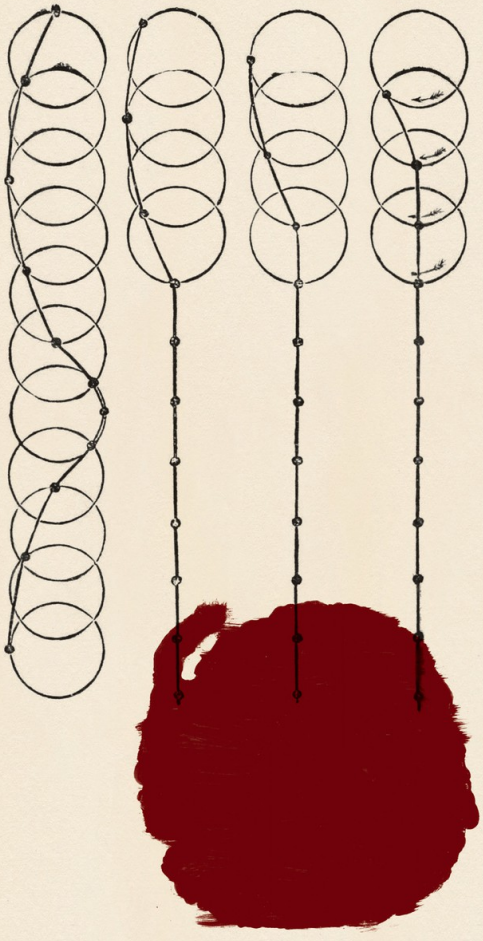

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UK festivals

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Tectonics
Tenth anniversary of this experimental music festival co-curated by BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conductor Ilan Volkov and Counterflows festival's Alasdair Campbell. This year's line-up includes performances by Lucrecia Dalt, Carl Stone, Ingrid Laubrock, Jérôme Noetinger, Limpe Fuchs, Semay Wu and Aki Takahashi; orchestral premieres of works by composer Linda Buckley and others; and an installation by Ryoko Akama. The majority of the performances will be recorded for broadcast on BBC Radio 3 with some performances available to watch online. Glasgow City Halls & Old Fruitmarket, 29–30 April, £32–£16, bbc.co.uk

International festivals

Archipel Switzerland
Ten days of music and sound art research. Concerts, listening lounge, kids' playroom, installations, workshops and radio station. With Laurie Anderson, Pierre Bastien, General Magic, Sarah Hennies, Thomas Ankersmit, Lionel Marchetti, Re-Ghoster Extended, Tashi Wada & Julia Holter, Hildegard Westerkamp, Will Guthrie and Ellen Arkbro, and many more. Plus music by Éliane Radigue, Pita, Morton Feldman, Steve Reich and Hildegard von Bingen. Geneva Maison Communale De Plainpalais, 31 March–9 April, 2023.archipel.org

Banlieues Bleues France
40th edition of this month-long music festival in the northern suburbs of Paris. With Yeah You, Klein, Ben LaMar Gay Ensemble, The Dwarfs Of East Agouza, Pink Siifu & Ahwlee, Hamid Drake's *Turiya: Honouring Alice Coltrane*, Valentina Magaletti, Sélébéyone, Marc Ribot's The Jazz-Bins, Elvin Brandhi & Nadah El Shazly's *Pollution Opera*, Farida Amadou, Rokia Koné & Raül Refree, Fulu Mziki Collective, and more. Paris various venues, 24 March–21 April, various times and prices, banlieuesbleues.org

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Big Ears US
200 performances over four days in downtown Knoxville including Sun Ra Arkestra, John Zorn, Grouper, Arooj Aftab, Bill Frisell, Tyshawn Sorey, 700 Bliss, Carl Stone, Caterina Barbieri, Makaya McCraven, Mary Halvorson, Éliane Radigue, Annea Lockwood, Catherine Lamb, Steve Reich, Terry Allen, Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet, James 'Blood' Ulmer, William Parker, King Britt, Steve, Lonnie Holley and Kali Malone. TN Knoxville various venues, 30 March–2 April, $850–$125, bigearsfestival.org

Cafe Oto UK
Events at the North East London venue for experimental music include: Eavesdropping Festival with Silvia Tarozzi, Lucy Railton, NikNak and more (30 March–2 April), "A" Trio (5–6 April), Fred Moten/Brandon López/Gerald Cleaver (8–9), Steve Gunn & David Moore (10), Phill Niblock (15), Ale Hop (17), Helena Anahita Wilson (19), John Wiese (24), Shit & Shine (27–28). London Cafe Oto, various times & prices, cafeoto.co.uk

Counterflows UK
Four days of innovative international music from the fringes with performances, commissions, club nights, discussions, zine fair and hang outs. Featuring Cara Tolmie & Rian Treanor, Maggie Nicols, Brandon López/Fred Moten/Gerald Cleaver, Mariam Rezaei/Maria Chavez/Victoria Shen, Max Syedtollan & Music Space, "A" Trio, Silvia Tarozzi & Deborah Walker, Nour Mobarak, On Yee Lo, Judith Hamann, Donna Candy, Ron-Pon and Hannan Jones/Shamica Ruddock/Pat Thomas. Glasgow various venues, 6–9 April, £83.95–pay what you can, counterflows.com

Iklectik UK
Events at the South London performance space include: Phantom Limb Fifth Anniversary (1 April), Ken Hollings's *At The Gates Of Purgatory* with Howlround and Mark Pilkington (5), 10ish Years Of Blue Tapes with Anna Homler and Ashtray Navigations (9). London Iklectik, various times and prices, iklectikartlab.com

Intonal Sweden
Experimental and electronic music festival with Will Guthrie & Ensemble Nist-Nah, Phew, Rian Treanor & Leila Ziu, :zoviet*france:, Coby Sey, Bendik Giske, Laila Sakini, Gavsborg, Jay Glass Dubs, Abdullah Miniawy and Vanligt Folk. Malmö Inkonst, 26–30 April, early bird 645 kr, intonalfestival.com

Rewire Netherlands
Adventurous music festival with Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Sélébéyone, Nwando Ebizie, Maria Chavez/Mariam Rezaei/Victoria Shen, Tim Hecker, Authentically Plastic, Ellen Fullman & The Living Earth Show, Peter Zummo, Matthew Herbert , Ale Hop, Éliane Radigue, Afrorack, Daniel Blumberg, Ellen Arkbro & Johan Graden, Ghosted, Nadah El Shazly & Elvin Brandhi, Deena Abdelwahed, Dale Cornish, Slickback x Weirdcore, Okkyung Lee, Pamela Z, Thomas Ankersmit, Joe Rainey, Julia Reidy, Dwarfs Of East Agouza, and many more. The Hague various venues, 6–9 April, from €95, rewirefestival.nl

Sátántangó Germany
Béla Tarr's seven hour magnum opus starring Mihály Víg. Digitally remastered print shown without breaks underneath a crematorium. Berlin silent green, 31 March–1 April, digitalinberlin.de

Sonic Protest France
18 evenings of concerts of adventurous music in and around Paris, plus a streaming radio station. With Eugene Chadbourne, Russell Haswell, El Khat, Avalanche Kaito, Marina Rosenfeld, Alan Courtis and Ryoko Akama. Paris various venues, 14 March–2 April, sonicprotest.com

Ale Hop

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BRDCST Belgium
Brussels' main music venue plays host to 30 artists including Kode9's *Escapology*, Sarathy Korwar's *Kalak*, Slumberland & Sainkho Namtchylak, El Khat, Tim Hecker, DJ Marcelle, The Dwarfs Of East Agouza, Joe Rainey, Ill Considered, Gaye Su Akyol, Steve Gunn x David Moore, Steve Gunn x Zoh Amba, Tom Skinner, Elvin Brandhi, Yeah You, and more. Brussels AB, 7–9 April, €50/weekend, €23–€22/night, abconcerts.be

Donaufestival Austria
Two weekends of new music, installations and talks. First artists announced include Debby Friday, Puce Mary, Phew, Marina Herlop, Félicia Atkinson, Arooj Aftab with Vijay Iyer & Shahzad Ismaily, Klara Lewis & Nik Colk Void, Godflesh, Big | Brave, Moin, James Holden, Hüma Utku, DJ Lag and Rojin Sharafi. Krems an der Donau various venues, 28–30 April & 5–7 May, early bird €78–€60, donaufestival.at

LEV Spain
First names released for this four day electronic sound and AV festival include Robert Henke, Hélène Vogelsinger, Throwing Snow and Ikonika. Gijón various venues, 27–30 April, levfestival.com

Music Current Ireland
Dublin's Sound Lab presents four days of experimental contemporary music. Featuring multimedia music theatre by Natacha Diels, audio and visual works performed by The Nadar Ensemble, and Michael Maierhof's micro-opera *Cold Sweat*. Plus workshops and discussions. Dublin various venues, 12–15 April, various times & prices, musiccurrent.ie

Oscillation Belgium
This year's Brussels based experimental music festival is organised around the theme of time. With Limpe Fuchs & Valérie Vivancos, Éliane Radigue's *Sigma*, Katharina Ernst, Mark Vernon, Charlemagne Palestine, Juliet Fraser performs Morton Feldman, Jessica Ekomane, Farida Amadou, Felix Kubin, Maia Urstad, Rebecca Lane & Clara de Asís, and more. Brussels Needcompany and HISK, 27–30 April, £TBA, oscillation-festival.be

Présences Électronique France
Three nights of contemporary electronic experimentation on a surround sound system with music by Olivia Block, Stephen O'Malley, Eiko Ishibashi & Jim O'Rourke, Puce Mary, :zoviet*france:, Daphne Oram, Flora Yin Wong, Jérôme Noetinger, KMRU, Tomoko Sauvage, Michèle Bokanowski, and more. Paris Maison de la Radio et de la Musique, 14–16 April, 8:30pm, €10/evening, maisondelaradioetdelamusique.fr

Reception Weekend Ireland
A new weekend of experimental music in Dublin with Mark Fell & Mohammad Reza Mortazavi, Pat Thomas, Judith Hamann, Sharon Phelan, Julia Reidy, and more. Dublin The Complex, 31 March–1 April, €50, receptiondublin.com

Sonica Slovenia
Contemporary electronic music and transitory art festival featuring live performances, DJs, talks and exhibitions. With Lucrecia Dalt, Ale Hop, Nihiloxica, Abadir, Bitter Babe, and more to be announced. Ljubljana various venues, 19–22 April, €35, sonica.si

Tremor Portugal
Azorean multi-arts event with Angel Bat Dawid, Avalanche Kaito, Divide And Dissolve, Grove, Marina Herlop, Ill Considered, Ella Minus and HHY & The Kampala Unit. Azores São Miguel Island, 28 March–1 April, tremor-pdl.com

Ulrichsberger Kaleidophon Austria
Festival for jazz, improvised and contemporary composed music with Phil Minton & Carl Ludwig Hübsch, The Sea Trio: Masahiko Satoh/Otomo Yoshihide/Roger Turner, Jane In Ether: Magda Mayas/Miako Klein/Biliana Voutchkova, Last Dream Of The Morning: John Butcher/John Edwards/Mark Sanders, Sylvie Courvoisier Trio, Gratkowski/Kaufman/De Joode/Buck, and more. Ulrichsberg Jazzatelier, 28–30 April, jazzatelier.at

Variations France
Wide ranging festival of adventurous music in upper Brittany with performances by Lucrecia Dalt, Will Guthrie & Ensemble Nist Nah, Abdullah Ibrahim, Carl Stone, Sélébéyone, DJ Marcelle, Silvia Tarozzi & Deborah Walker, Moin, Okkyung Lee, Puce Mary, Claire Rousay & Leya, Joe Rainey, Marina Herlop, and more. Plus music by Éliane Radigue, Pauline Oliveros, Delia Derbyshire, and others. Nantes Le Lieu Unique, 28 March–9 April, festival-variations.fr

Special events

AACM New York City Chapter US
The Afro-American avant garde organisation hosts a series of events until December. This month features Thurman Barker Quintet + Adegoke Steve Colson & Iqua Colson's Unity Troupe with Chico Freeman and Douglas R Ewart. New York Park Avenue Armory Artists Studio, 22 April, 7pm $65, aacm-newyork.com

Black Sound Symposium US
Performances by DeForrest Brown, Jr, Stephanie Hewett, Anthony R Green and Bill Solomon, plus panel discussions, workshops and talks on the theme of Black sound and Black spaces. Santa Cruz Indexical, 20–22 April, indexical.org

Catherine Christer Hennix's Kamigaku Ensemble Norway
Swedish artist, composer, poet and mathematician and her just intonation ensemble perform a new work for sustained tones on trumpet and shō. Oslo Munchmuseet, 23 April, 7pm, NOK 250, blankforms.org

Kiezsalon Germany
First event of the 2023 series for this roaming Berlin event, with Nik Colk Void, Audrey Chen & Kaffe Matthews, Yamila and Surgeons Girl. Berlin Akademie der Künste, 29 April, 7pm, €23, digitalinberlin.de

Online & hybrid events

Roulette US/Online
In-person concerts at New York's longrunning experimental music space, many of which are also livestreamed: Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba (14 April), Wendy Eisenberg's *Eye Music* (20) and Morton Subotnick's 90th Birthday Celebration (23). Online & New York Roulette, various times and prices, roulette.org

Exhibitions & installations

Dingerland Germany
Klaus Dinger of Kraftwerk, NEU! and La Düsseldorf is portrayed via video documents, most of them previously unpublished, as well as other objects from the drummer's archive. Düsseldorf Filmwerkstatt, 25 March–2 April, filmwerkstatt-duesseldorf.de

Exotic Immensity France
Exhibition of Evan Crankshaw's collages for Portugal's Discrepant label accompanied by concerts featuring Andrew Pekler + Pierre Bastien (27 March) and Tomás Tello + The Dead Mauriacs + Pak Yan Lau (23 April). Rennes Ateliers du Vent, 28 March–23 April, exhibition free/donations, lesateliersduvent.org

Jez riley French: *Audible Silence* UK
Sound exhibition (14–16 April) and two talks on the use of different microphones for field recordings (21–23) by the durational, micro and biological sound artist. London DivFuse, free exhibition, £8 ticketed talks, divfuse.com

UK on stage

***Ark Hive Of A Live*: An Evening With Andrew Poppy**
Launch event for eclectic composer-producer Poppy's limited edition book and four CD live set. Poppy will review his career in conversation and perform "Almost The Same Shame" alongside screenings of video pieces. London Century Club, 4 April, 6:30pm, £12, centuryclub.co.uk

Regan Bowering/David Toop/Andrea Bolzoni/Douglas Benford
Matinee performance from a new quartet of improvisors. London Hundred Years Gallery, 16 April, 3:30pm, £8, hundredyearsgallery.co.uk

Big Thief + L'Rain
Brooklyn based folk rock quartet tour with support from DIY avant soul artist L'Rain: Leeds Brudenell Social Club (4 April) Gateshead The Sage (5), Edinburgh Usher Hall (6), Manchester O2 Apollo (7), Cardiff University Great Hall (8) and London Eventim Apollo Hammersmith (11–12). Irain.info

Bråk
Improvised music series in South London: Cath Roberts & Graham Dunning + Tom Ward & Panos Ghikas + Colin Webster & Robbie Judkins. London Waterintobeer, 22 April, 6:30pm, One Bank Of England Note, brakbrakbrak.co.uk

Kaushiki Chakraborty
Indian classical khayal vocalist performs with Ojas Adhiya on tabla, Murad Ali on sarangi and Tanmay Deochake on harmonium. London Barbican, 1 April, 7:30pm, £20, barbican.org.uk

Richard Dawson
Newcastle's avant singer-

songwriter tours new and old songs including some from his latest album *The Ruby Cord*: Manchester New Century Hall (25 April), Glasgow St Luke's (26), Liverpool Tung Auditorium (27), Leeds City Varieties (28), North Shields The Exchange Theatre (29), Cardiff The Gate Art Centre (3 May), Bristol St George's (4), London Barbican (5), Birmingham Conservatoire (6) and Belfast Black Box, (25). richarddawson.ffm.to

Russell Haswell + Meemo Comma
Joint headline gig for Haswell's noise abstractions and Lara Rix-Martin's electronica alias, with support from Sugo and DJ Microcorps aka Alexander Tucker. London Walthamstow Trades Hall (upstairs), 1 April, 7pm–1am, £10.40, ra.co

Mary Lattimore
UK tour for the Los Angeles based harpist, with support from Leafcutter John in London on 21 April: Bristol Dareshack (9 April), Manchester Hallé St Michael's (12), Kendal Brewery Arts Centre (14), Guildford The Boileroom (17), Brighton Komedia (19) and London St John On Bethnal Green (20–21). marylattimoreharpist.bandcamp.com

LSO Discovery
London Symphony Orchestra present new works by John Aulich, Liam Dougherty, Tonia Ko and Kate Milligan. London Jerwood Hall LSO St Luke's, 7pm, £8–£5, lso.co.uk

Mopomoso
Long running monthly improvised music matinee with Benedict Taylor + George Haslam & Marcio Mattos + Daniel Cano/Andrea di Biase /Dave Storey. London Vortex, 23 April, 2pm, £12–£8, vortexjazz.co.uk

Dave Okumu & The 7 Generations
Songwriter steps out with a concept driven song cycle *I Came From Love* (Transgressive) with guest appearances from Grace Jones and Byron Wallen. Support is from Yazmin Lacey. London Roundhouse, 20 April, 7pm, £25–£17.50, roundhouse.org.uk

One Orchestra New
A large group of improvising musicians brought together by saxophonist Caroline Kraabel comprising women, non-binary and trans people. The group pose questions about power, while aiming to make improvised music anew. London Vortex, 14 April, 7:45pm, £12, vortexjazz.co.uk

Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith
Moving from ambient to more robust experimental pop shapes on her most recent album *Let's Turn It Into Sound*: London Kings Place (15 April), Bristol The Fleece (17), Leeds Belgrave Music Hall (19), Manchester Canvas (20) and Brighton Chalk (23). kaitlynaureliasmith.com

Colin Stetson
The circular breathing saxophonist and soundtrack composer on tour: Bristol Strange Brew (27 April), London Union Chapel (28), Brighton Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (29), Manchester The Blues Kitchen (1 May), Leeds Howard Assembly Room (2) and Belfast Black Box (6). colinstetson.com

Reich + Calix + Eastman
London Sinfonietta present a composition by Steve Reich which was written to be performed alongside painter Gerhard Richter's film *Moving Picture*; plus Julius Eastman's *Joy Boy*, Mira Calix's *Nunu* and other works. London Royal Festival Hall, 6 April, 7:30pm, £45–£20, londonsinfonietta.org.uk

Claire Rousay + Laila Sakini
Intimate field recordings from Rousay and melodic melancholy from Sakini. London Grand Junction, 11 April, 7:30pm, £16, dice.fm

Sound Unwrapped
Concert series exploring spatial dimensions in live performance including a 19 speaker sound system: Explore Ensemble play Catherine Lamb, Rebecca Saunders and Beatrice Dillon (14 April), Marina Herlop (14) and Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith presents *Let's Turn It Into Sound* (15). London Kings Place, various times & prices, kingsplace.co.uk

UKAEA with Dali De St Paul, Agathe Max & Yoshino Shigihara
Post-apocalyptic performance from UKAEA with Dali De St Paul, Agathe Max and Yoshino Shigihara, plus support from Justin Paton, Xylitol and Rob Hart. London Walthamstow Trades Hall (upstairs), 14 April, 7pm–1am, £10.40, ra.co

Ove Volquartz & Cheltenham Improvisers Orchestra
Featuring bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet player Volquartz, known for his work with Cecil Taylor and prog rock group Annexus Quam. Cheltenham The Wilson, 27 April, 6pm–7pm, free/reservations, cheltenhammuseum.org.uk

Yo La Tengo
Longrunning New Jersey trio with a new album *This Stupid World* on Matador: Dublin 3 Olympia Theatre (10 April), Manchester New Century Hall (12), Bristol SWX (13) and London Palladium (14). yolatengo.com

Incoming

FIMAV Canada
The Festival Musique Actuelle Victoriaville presents a week of concerts, sound art installations in public places, films and visual art. With John Zorn Music For Trios and New Masada Quartet, Ikue Mori's *Tracing The Magic*, Fred Frith/Heike Liss/Susana Santos Silva, Buñuel, Fujita & Eye, Poil Ueda, Void Patrol, Tashi Dorji & Dave Rempis, François Houle/Kate Gentile/Alexander Hawkins, Lori Freedman, Zoh Amba and more. Victoriaville various venues, 15–21 May, fimav.qc.ca

Monheim Triennale Germany
The second edition of this festival in a town near Düsseldorf focuses on sound art in public spaces over the course of a month. Participating artists include Chris Watson, Emeka Ogboh, Robert Wilson, Caroline Devine, John Grzinich and Staalplaat Soundsystem. Monheim am Rhein various venues, 3 June–2 July, monheim-triennale.de

Q3Ambientfest Germany
In person and virtual performances in classical, ambient and diverse genres by Julia Reidy, Laura Cannell, Mabe Fratti, Yair Elazar Glotman and many more. Potsdam Kesselhaus, 2–4 June, bruederselke.com

Send listings two months in advance to listings@thewire.co.uk. For more events listings go to thewire.co.uk/events, follow @thewiremagazine on Twitter, and sign up to our weekly newsletter at thewire.co.uk/newsletters

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Recent items posted on thewire.co.uk

El Khat

Gamut Inc

Mark Jenkin

Video
Film of El Khat & The Yemeni Orchestra performing live in Tel Aviv-Jaffa; and Slovenian trio Širom's collaboration with French hurdy-gurdy player Yann Gourdon.

Audio
A new mix by retro-futurist Berlin duo Gamut Inc; an exclusive live recording by Burkina Faso–Belgium duo Avalanche Kaito; and *The Wire*'s latest Office Ambience playlist.

Writing
Clive Bell selects ten pieces of writing from *The Wire*'s online library; and film maker Mark Jenkin runs through his favourite movie scores.

Listings
News of forthcoming festivals, concerts, exhibitions, talks, workshops, online streams and other events added daily.

Listen to recent editions of Adventures In Sound And Music

Coultrain

Širom

AGF

23 February
Derek Walmsley played tracks released by Greek underground labels Dasa Tapes, Granny Tapes, Rekem, Thalmos and others.

16 February
Phil England played tracks by Keith & Julie Tippett, Algiers, Katie Kim, Coultrain and others.

9 February
Meg Woof played tracks by Širom, James Brandon Lewis, aya, Matthew Shipp & Ivo Perelman and others.

2 February
Chris Bohn played tracks by Camae Ayewa, Lydia Lunch, AGF, Keiji Haino and others.

For full playlists of each show go to thewire.co.uk/audio/on-air.

To listen back to all *The Wire*'s radio shows go to mixcloud.com/thewiremagazine.

Adventures In Sound And Music is *The Wire*'s weekly show on Resonance 104.4 FM and Resonance Extra. It is broadcast every Thursday between 9–10:30pm with simultaneous streaming at resonancefm.com.

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471

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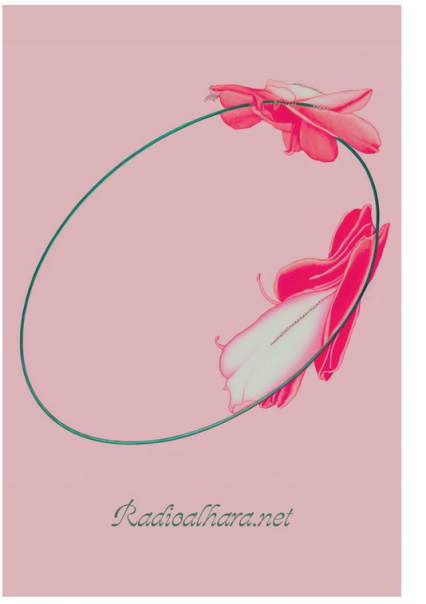

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SARA PERSICO – Boundary
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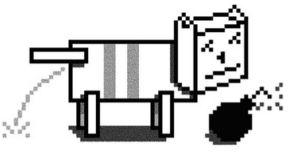

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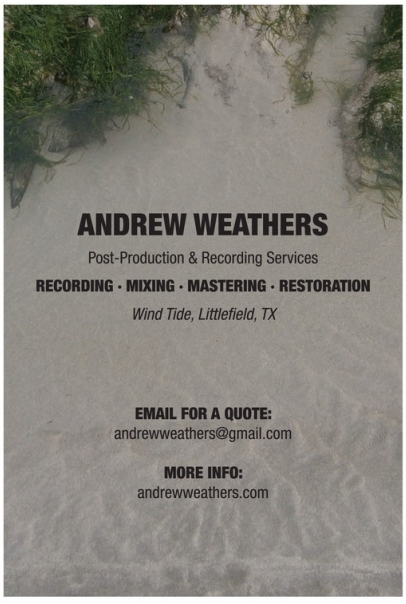

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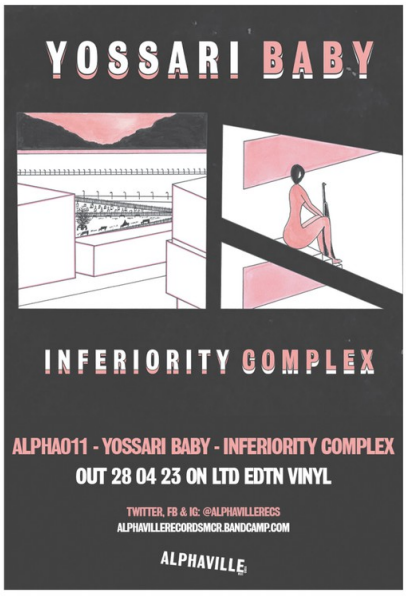

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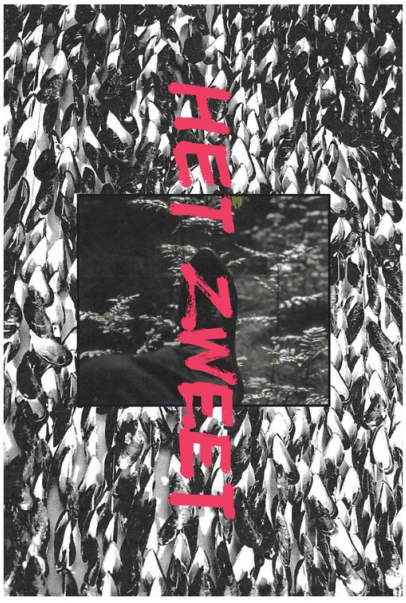

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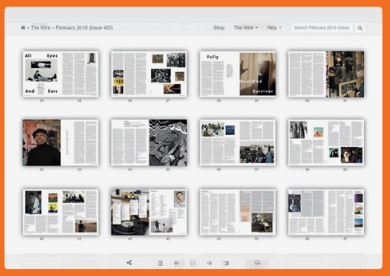

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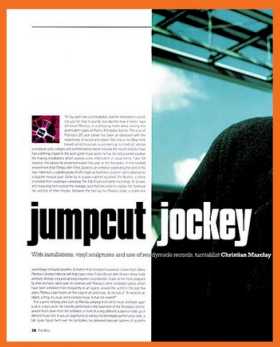

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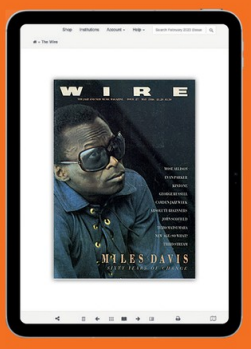

Tropical rainforests in the Americas introduce Francisco López to a deeper understanding of sonic reality

Rainforest in Peru, 2006

Paradoxical as it sounds, the wilderness had the biggest impact on me becoming a sound composer, which is what I believe I essentially am. I proudly claim this in the hope of contributing my two cents to the expansion of music, in spite of composition and music being sort of dirty words these days in some sound art circles. This is not a consequence of the traditional referential or allegoric 'inspiration from nature', but rather a lifelong, extensive, intensive and intimate interaction with what I call environmental sound matter through field listening, non-representational recording and creative work with sound.

I don't use any instruments, neither acoustic nor electronic, to generate my work. Instead, I like to cooperate with the endlessly astonishing non human-organised sonic reality in all its dimensions – that is, not the surprisingly limited concepts of so-called samples or field recordings, but the full phenomenological and ontological fabric of this *anthropoEXcentric* sonic reality. That implies not only material and formal complexity, but also inherent inner temporality, spatiality, dimensionality and, of course, multifarious existential revelations.

All of these experiential riches manifested strikingly in what is probably my greatest sonic epiphany, during my initial years in the tropical rainforests of Central and South America in the 1990s. Rainforest ecosystems are naturally acousmatic environments: sonically dense, rich, diverse, intricate, relentless... and yet sources of those sounds remain marvellously hidden and invisible in the dense multilayered vegetation. At the time, as a biologist, I was also doing research in ecosystem dynamics, and some of it required working at night, alone in the rainforest, for extensive periods of time.

It is only at night that things get going seriously in the rainforest. Intensely alive, astoundingly active, restless, inscrutable, boundless, unfathomable – truly a Gaian creature all around you. By way of example, the prototypical cartoon red eyes floating around in the darkness are a very real and common thing in some of these tropical rainforests. They just don't feel so cartoonish when you are there.

As someone who by that stage already had years of involvement with noise and experimental music based on recorded materials, it blew my sonic-creative mind at different levels. This is not simple fascination with how peculiar or incredible some animal calls might be, for example. You soon get over that. It was – and remains – more about how different, thrilling, richer and challenging this sonic world and substance are for an avid creative listener, as compared to any other imaginable music or sound work. For me, it is the profound *experience* of these environments – not information about them or their description – that seeps in deeply as a transformative force.

Similarly, it is the experience of ontologically self-sufficient recorded sound, not its lesser role as a potential representation or simulation, that generates interesting sonic creative dimensions. That's why I like to refer to my work as sonogenic composition (as a creative approach in which sound itself suggests and leads the compositional decisions, structure and nature).

Ever since the rainforests, my sound work has been fundamentally shaped by these ongoing and still sought-after experiences. Their transformative impact is something that really takes time and demands dedication – two currencies that are anathema to the present zeitgeist of accelerated impatience and superficial mega-representation.

While we might never be able to escape our human condition, I believe that being *some* sort of wilderness composer helps in mitigating the anthropomorphic and anthropocentric excesses that are so rampant today in our relationship with the world. In other words, this is not about listening to the desperate apocalyptic cry of those creatures and ecosystems whose extinction we say we want to prevent – something we should certainly do, even if our own extinction wasn't at stake – but instead about discovering that the world actually contains many more creatures and environments than we thought, if we include the sonic ones. The latter are ontologically self-sufficient and can evolve and wildly diversify in our hands and our minds. Unlike representation, this kind of *penetration* is something that gets us closer to – not farther away from – the world. A deeper form of realism not based on reference but presence.

While I think that the much admired Pierre Schaeffer could be considered a phenomenologist in the studio, I am more of an ontologist in the field. The rainforest as a sonic epiphany has contributed significantly over the years to what I refer to as field listening (pun intended), a post-media non-representational practice of profound listening. And this has, in turn, dramatically influenced my sense of complexity, multiplicity, depth, detail, nuance and savoir faire in sound composition, both for recording projects and for my proudly monomedia live performances and sound installations.

That first rainforest experience opened the door to a more refined listening and creative interaction with many other rainforests and different environments all over the world, from the Australian desert to the Himalayan mountains, the Icelandic fjords to the African savanna. It's a process that has fundamentally expanded and enriched my interaction with the world – and hopefully that of others as well. ○

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